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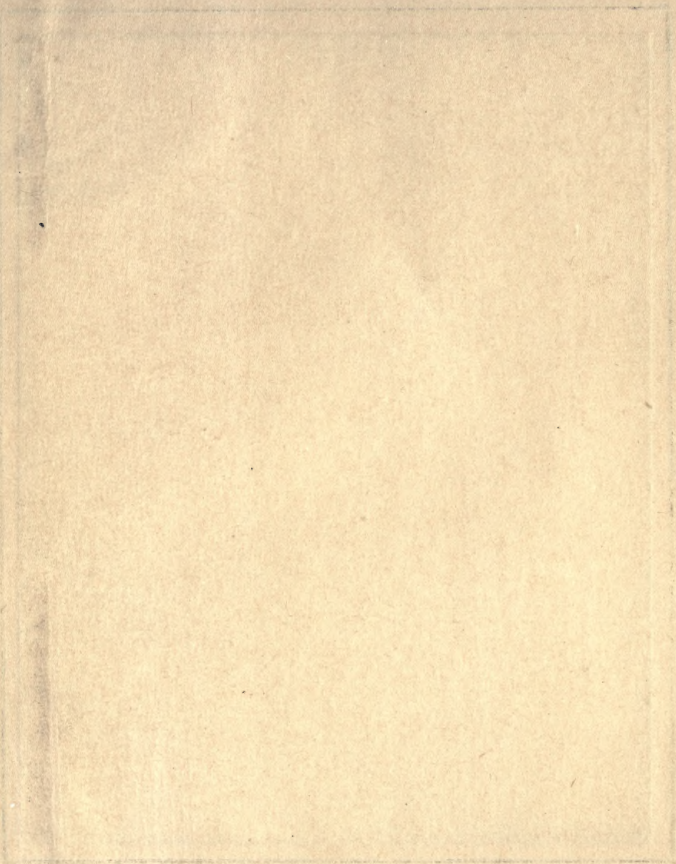
THE DICKENS
ORIGINALS BY
DWIN PUGH



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THE CHARLES DICKENS ORIGINALS



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CHARLES DICKENS

By Daniel Maclise, R.A.





THE CHARLES
DICKENS
ORIGINALS
BY EDWIN PUGH

AUTHOR OF "CHARLES DICKENS
THE APOSTLE OF THE PEOPLE"

T. N. FOULIS
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P R E F A C E

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E. P.

ST. ELLAR'S, HARROW WEALD.

October 1912.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE IMMORTAL CHILD

CHARLES DICKENS ORIGINALS

CHAPTER ONE

THE IMMORTAL CHILD

THERE ARE MANY PORTRAITS OF Charles Dickens ; but that portrait which photography has made most familiar to the world is perhaps the least expressive of his personality. It shows him as a worn and haggard man, with scanty grizzled locks, and a deeply-lined face. It is the portrait of a man prematurely old and wise and tired. It as little reflects the character of the author of *Pickwick* and all that magnificent sequence of books which culminated in *David Copperfield*, as the bald head and fat flaccid face of Shakespeare—the face of one enjoying a sleek, prosperous, and smug middle-age—reflects the character of the author of *Romeo and Juliet*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

But you will observe here certain reservations. It is not suggested that this portrait of Dickens at fifty does not look like the portrait of the author of *Bleak House* or *Hard Times* or *Little Dorrit*. And the original of that bourgeois Shakespeare of the Stratford-on-Avon bust might quite conceivably have written *The Tempest* or *King Lear* or *Coriolanus*. We have only a feeling of vague disillusion when we try to realise that men of such a commonplace exterior were the mighty geniuses who have created a new world for us.

And here, I think, our instinct is right. These

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bored-looking, sophisticated men of affairs are not the men who penned those flaming masterpieces which have so stirred and thrilled us. These men are as the shrivelled husks of that immortal shining soul which once irradiated the beautiful bloomy flesh and fired the rich red blood of appropriate youth. There was a time when the treasures that these god-like beings—by nature divine, human only by grace—poured forth in such rare abundance, were as diamonds flashing on the fair skin of a young girl's delicate bosom ; now they are as pearls concealed in the craggy rugged oyster-shell.

Dickens himself was acutely, whimsically conscious of this sad difference between the Ideal and the Real which does so plague and vex the inveterate hero-worshipper. Whilst on a visit to Edinburgh he wrote :

“ Walking up and down the hall of the courts of law (which was full of advocates, writers to the signet, clerks, and idlers) was a tall, burly, handsome man of eight and fifty, with a gait like O'Connell's, the bluest eyes you can imagine, and long hair—longer than mine—falling down in a wild way under the broad brim of his hat. He had on a surtout coat, a blue checked shirt ; the collar standing up and kept in its place with a wisp of black neckerchief ; no waistcoat, and a large pocket-handkerchief thrust into his breast, which was all broad and open. At his heels followed a wiry,

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sharp-eyed, shaggy devil of a terrier, dogging his steps as he went slashing up and down, now with one man beside him, now with another, and now quite alone, but always at a fast, rolling pace, with his head in the air, and his eyes as wide open as he could get them. I guessed it was Wilson, and it was. A bright, clear-complexioned, mountain-looking fellow, he looks as though he had just come down from the Highlands, and had never in his life taken pen in hand. But he has had an attack of paralysis in his right arm within this month. He winced when I shook hands with him, and once or twice when we were walking up and down slipped as if he had stumbled on a piece of orange-peel. He is a great fellow to look at, and to talk to ; and, if you could divest your mind of the actual Scott, is just the figure you would put in his place."

And, echoing Dickens, the portrait that I would put in the place of that well-known latter-day photograph is the portrait of himself at twenty-seven, painted by Maclise : a portrait that justifies Mrs. Carlyle in saying that his face was as if made of steel.

More soberly Forster describes him as one whose "look of youthfulness first attracted you, and then a candour and openness of expression which made you sure of the qualities within. The features were very good. He had a capital forehead ; a firm nose, with full, wide nostril ; eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect, and running

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over with humour and cheerfulness; and a rather prominent mouth, strongly marked with sensibility. The head was altogether well-formed and symmetrical, and the air and carriage of it were extremely spirited. The hair . . . was then of a rich brown and most luxuriant abundance, and the face . . . had hardly a vestige of hair or whisker ; but there was that in the face as I first recollect it which no time could change, and which remained implanted on it unalterably to the last. This was the quickness, keenness, and practical power, the eager, restless, energetic outlook on each several feature, that seemed to tell so little of a student or writer of books, and so much of a man of action and business in the world. Light and motion flashed from every part of it. . . . ' What a face is his to meet in a drawing-room ! ' wrote Leigh Hunt to me, the morning after I had made them known to each other. ' It has the life and soul in it of fifty human beings. ' In such sayings are expressed not alone the restless and resistless vivacity and force of which I have spoken, but that also which lay beneath them, of steadiness and hard endurance."

Yes, that was indeed the type of face which one would associate with all, except perhaps three or four, of the Dickens books. But it was not the face of the man who wrote in the preface to his next book after *David Copperfield*, when his high spirits had begun to flag and the fount of his

THE IMMORTAL CHILD

inspiration to bubble up a little less freely and brightly: "In *Bleak House* I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things." It had never before been necessary for him to dwell, of deliberate set purpose, upon any particular aspect of life. All aspects of life had been alike gilded and glorified by the ruddy glow of his radiant fancy. Even the essential repulsiveness of such human monsters as Fagin, Squeers, Quilp, Sampson and Sally Brass, Pecksniff, Carker, and Uriah Heep, had been veiled and tempered by the merry gleam and twinkle of his indomitable humour that played about their hideousness like summer lightning. There is romance and to spare in *Bleak House*; but it is dingy and grotesque romance. Even the boisterous fierce sweetness and gentleness of Boythorn seems to lack something of conviction: it is a little hard and flat; whilst the sly, self-seeking dilettantism of Skimpole is as different from the reckless florid Bohemianism of Micawber as the acrid taste of Marah-water is different from the mellow flavour of the famous bowl of punch. It was Dickens' consciousness of a decline in power which impelled him to insist upon that note in his work which had hitherto been its chief distinguishing note.

And the chief distinguishing note of Dickens' work, until the hour of his apogee, was clear and bell-like as the laughter of a child. Dickens was

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the immortal boy whom Mr. Barrie has rediscovered in *Peter Pan*. Perhaps it was because Dickens' best childhood had not happened to him in his earliest years that he remained a child so long and indeed never grew up altogether. Writing in 1853 in the editorial plural he says :

“ We have never grown the thousandth part of an inch out of Robinson Crusoe. He fits us just as well, and in exactly the same way, as when we were among the smallest of the small. We have never grown out of his parrot or his dog, or his fowling-piece, or the horrible old staring goat he came upon in the cave, or his rusty money, or his cap, or umbrella. There has been no change in the manufacture of telescopes, since that blessed ship's spy-glass was made, through which, lying on his breast at the top of his fortification, with the ladder drawn up after him and all made safe, he saw the black figures of those cannibals moving round the fire on the sea-sand, as the monsters danced themselves into an appetite for dinner. We have never grown out of Friday, or the excellent old father he was so glad to see, or the grave and gentlemanly Spaniard, or the reprobate Will Atkins, or the knowing way in which he and those other mutineers were lured up into the Island when they came ashore there and their boat was stove. We have got no nearer heaven by the altitude of an atom, in respect of the tragi-comic bear whom Friday caused to dance upon a tree,



Charles Dickens

CHARLES DICKENS

THE IMMORTAL CHILD

or the awful array of howling wolves in the dismal weather, who were mad to make good entertainment of man and beast, and who were received with trains of gunpowder laid on fallen trees, and fired by the snapping of pistols; and who ran blazing into the forest darkness, or were blown up famously. Never sail we, idle, in a little boat, and hear the rippling water at the prow, and look upon the land, but we know that our boat-growth stopped for ever, when Robinson Crusoe sailed round the Island, and, having been nearly lost, was so affectionately awakened out of his sleep at home again by that immortal parrot, great progenitor of all the parrots we have ever known. . . .

“ We have never grown out of the real original roaring giants. We have seen modern giants, for various considerations ranging from a penny to half-a-crown; but, they have only had a head apiece, and have been merely large men, and not always that. We have never outgrown the putting to ourselves of this supposititious case: Whether, if we, with a large company of brothers and sisters, had been put in his (by which we mean, of course, in Jack’s) trying situation, we should have had at once the courage and the presence of mind to take the golden crowns (which it seems they always wore as night-caps) off the heads of the giant’s children as they lay a-bed, and put them on our family; thus causing our treacherous host to batter his own offspring and spare us.

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We have never outgrown a want of confidence in ourselves, in this particular. . . .

“ We have never outgrown the whole region of Covent Garden. We preserve it as a fine, dissipated, insoluble mystery. We believe that the gentleman mentioned in Colman’s *Broad Grins* still lives in King Street. We have a general idea that the passages at the Old Hummums lead to groves of gorgeous bedrooms, eating out the whole of the adjacent houses : where Chamberlains who have never been in bed themselves for fifty years, show any country gentleman who rings at the bell, at any hour of the night, to luxurious repose in palatial apartments fitted up after the Eastern manner. (We have slept there in our time, but that makes no difference.) There is a fine secrecy and mystery about the Piazza ;—how you get up to those rooms above it, and what reckless deeds are done there. (We know some of these apartments very well, but that does not signify in the least.) We have not outgrown the two great Theatres. Ghosts of great names are always getting up the most extraordinary pantomimes in them, with scenery and machinery on a tremendous scale. We have no doubt that the critics sit in the pit of both houses, every night. Even as we write in our commonplace office, we behold from the window, four young ladies with peculiarly limp bonnets, and of a yellow or drab style of beauty, making for the stage-door of the

THE IMMORTAL CHILD

Lyceum Theatre, in the dirty little fog-choked street over the way. Grown-up wisdom whispers that these are beautiful fairies by night, and that they will find Fairyland dirty even to their splashed skirts, and rather cold and dull (notwithstanding its mixed gas and daylight), this easterly morning. But, we don't believe it.

" . . . We have never outgrown the rugged walls of Newgate, or any other prison on the outside. All within is still the same blank of remorse and misery. We have never outgrown Baron Trenck. Among foreign fortifications, trenches, counterscarps, bastions, sentries, and what not, we always have him, filing at his chains down in some arched darkness far below, or taming the spiders to keep him company. We have never outgrown the wicked old Bastille. Here, in our mind at this present childish moment, is a distinct ground-plan (wholly imaginative and resting on no kind of authority), of a maze of low-vaulted passages with small black doors ; and here, inside of this remote door on the left, where the black cobwebs hang like a veil from the arch, and the jailer's lamp will scarcely burn, was shut up, in black silence through so many years, that old man of the affecting anecdote, who was at last set free. But, who brought his white face, and his white hair, and his phantom figure, back again, to tell them what they had made him—how he had no wife, no child, no friend, no recognition of the light and

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air—and prayed to be shut up in his old dungeon till he died.

“We received our earliest and most enduring impressions among barracks and soldiers, and ships and sailors. We have outgrown no story of voyage and travel, no love of adventure, no ardent interest in voyagers and travellers. We have outgrown no country inn—roadside, in the market-place, or on a solitary heath; no country landscape, no windy hillside, no old manor-house, no haunted place of any degree, not a drop in the sounding sea. Though we are equal (on strong provocation) to the Lancers, and may be heard of in the Polka, we have not outgrown Sir Roger de Coverley, or any country dance in the music-book. We hope we have not outgrown the capacity of being easily pleased with what is meant to please us, or the simple folly of being gay upon occasion without the least regard to being grand.”

There speaks the immortal child: the boy who never grew up . . . until, as we shall see, he met with his first great disillusion.

We average folk view the world with the eyes of use and wont. We see things as we expect or desire or have been taught to see them. Our vision is clouded by mists of prepossession or prejudice; it is distorted by some moral or mental bias that causes us to squint and blink at the facts of life instead of looking them fairly and squarely in the

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face. As little children we lived in a new amazing world, staring with grave curiosity at all the queer objects that surrounded us, wondering what they all meant, forming our own ideas about them, and giving forth our judgments in regard to them with that simple directness which is at once so scathing and so apposite. It is out of the mouths of babes and sucklings (in the Biblical phrase) that praise is indeed perfected. For children praise only that which is good in their eyes, and not, as men do, that which they think they ought to praise. And as in approval so in condemnation : the criticisms of children are always at least honest. They do not admire a picture because it bears a famous name, but because its colour or its subject appeals to their unsophisticated taste. They will only consent to be nursed by Uncle Midas because he tips them shillings, and not even his shillings can bribe them to silence on the subject of his funny nose. They go about asking all manner of questions about all manner of things in a most disconcerting way. And they are not to be put off or turned aside by any equivocations. It is not enough to tell them that certain things have always been so, they want to know why they have always been so, why people have put up with them so long, and why they cannot be altered.

In this they are extraordinarily like Charles Dickens.

And they are like Charles Dickens in their

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acute perception of the grotesque and the humorous, the hideous and the fantastic, aspects of life. They believe in devils and fairies, ghosts and bogeys, as he did. They have in excess the elemental twin senses of horror and fun that cause them to scream in the dark at the figments of their own imagination, and to laugh at the spectacle of a fat pompous old gentleman who has tripped on a piece of orange peel and fallen in the mud. It does not matter to them that the dream which frightened them is so improbable as to be merely absurd: one thinks of the Spontaneous Combustion of Krook in this connection. Nor does it matter to them that the fat pompous old gentleman is, say, the Lord High Chancellor, or a bishop, or the Prime Minister, or even a king. They do not understand social values. They do not see why, because an undersized, coarse, puny, stupid old gentleman, or an idle, vain, insipid, selfish lady has money or rank, he or she should be served and waited on and bowed down to by big, fine, strong, clever men, or hard-working, gentle, loving, lovable, and unselfish women. They cannot grasp the significance of that parental decree which ordains that they may play only with certain stiff, starchy children whom they detest, instead of with far jollier, dirtier, noisier children whom they consider charming. And they flatly refuse to believe that cookie who makes such delicious confections, and Annie the housemaid who knows

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such heaps on heaps of nursery rhymes, and Orson the groom who can whistle through his fingers, are not more wonderful and admirable persons than Aunt Alicia and Lady Disdain and the Honorable Archie Purdew. In these particulars also they are very like Dickens; or, one should rather say, he is very like them.

It is sometimes urged against Dickens that he labelled his characters, and from start to finish forced them to live up to their label. I think it would be truer to say that it is we, the average folk, who label our friends and acquaintances and neighbours, and refuse to believe in anything about them that seems to contradict the label. We take people for granted. Dickens did not. He looked at people, as children do, with ever fresh frank interest; and he saw that they were, all of them, really very funny, or very pathetic, or very good, or very bad. He seized on their salient peculiarities, and by a sort of sublime logic deduced the whole man from the cast and texture of his face, the colour of his hair or eyes, the cut of his clothes, his idiosyncracies of manner or speech, and the general effect of his personality.

He did believe that that outward seeming reflected the inner spirit. "There is (he says) nothing truer than physiognomy, taken in connection with manner. The art of reading that book of which Eternal Wisdom obliges every human creature to present his or her own page with the

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individual character written on it, is a difficult one, perhaps, and is little studied. It may require some natural aptitude, and it must require (for everything does) some patience and some pains. That these are not usually given to it, that numbers of people accept a few stock commonplace expressions of the face as the whole list of characteristics, and neither seek nor know the refinements that are truest, that You, for instance, give a great deal of time and attention to the reading of music, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Hebrew, if you please, and do not qualify yourself to read the face of the master or mistress looking over your shoulder teaching it to you, I assume to be five hundred times more probable than improbable. Perhaps a little self-sufficiency may be at the bottom of this ; facial study requires no study from you, you think ; it comes by nature to you to know enough about it, and you are not to be taken in. I confess, for my part, that I *have* been taken in, over and over again. I have been taken in by acquaintances, and I have been taken in (of course) by friends ; far oftener by friends than by any other class of persons. How came I to be so deceived ? Had I quite misread their faces ? No. Believe me, my first impression of those people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true. My mistake was in suffering them to come nearer to me and explain themselves away."

In this sense, then, Dickens drew from life as



LEIGH HUNT

"Skimpole"

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the painter draws from the model. But it is a poor painter who paints only portraits of models. The true creative artist inevitably and invariably endows all his subjects with some vague elusive quality of his own genius which uplifts them from the commonplace, transfigures and glorifies them. He paints not individuals but types. He shows us men and women, scenes and incidents, which suggest to us men and women we have known, scenes and incidents we have ourselves beheld or taken part in. He shows us old familiar things in a new unfamiliar light, and so reveals their inner meaning to us. It may be that hitherto these things have seemed to bear no definite significance; but never again shall we see them, or experience them, or remember them, or come into close contact with them, without feeling that they have in some mysterious way been invested with a new poignant interest. In short, the artist has opened our eyes to the truth. And this is the daily miracle of art : making the blind to see.

It was a miracle that only Dickens, after Shakespeare, was able to perform with consistent success. We have grown so used to Shakespeare's people that we never think of them as caricatures. We accept them as universal types. Yet they are, in numberless instances, quite as grotesque, quite as highly coloured, and quite as improbable—to the average purblind intelligence—as Dickens' people. Set Malvolio against Pecksniff, or Fal-

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staff against Micawber—to choose two rough-and-ready examples—and you will see that they are all four alike incredible and yet living figures.

The truth is, of course, that whole masses of people approximate more or less to one type, and that to express that type the artist must sum up all the variations from it in one colossal archetype. In this way, and in this way only, is it possible to create characters that shall become immortal. (Sherlock Holmes, alone among modern creations, is likeliest to become immortal, and for this reason.) For we are, most of us, so much alike, we differ so little from others of our own kidney, that it would be possible to marshal a succession of individuals who, beginning with Quilp, evolved by infinitesimal gradations, into the saintly, preposterous Tom Pinch. The two extremes of the line are in such violent contrast as to seem irreconcilable with the fact of their common human nature; and yet at no point in the line could you point to any member of that close-packed phalanx and say: "It is here that one type ceases and another type comes into being." But you could set Dickens' characters in a row and say just that. You can quite easily perceive the difference between Skimpole and Micawber, or Sam Weller and Mark Tapley. And it is precisely because of this stark rawness in depiction that Dickens' people, by virtue of their very eccentricity, live.

But apologists of Dickens, jealous for his re-

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putation, have been at considerable pains—unnecessary pains, perhaps—to prove that many of his characters had actual prototypes ; that the originals of Mrs. Nickleby and Mr. Micawber were Dickens' own mother and father ; that Skimpole and Boythorn were recognisable caricatures of Leigh Hunt and Walter Savage Landor, and so on. And even to-day there are certain obscure Dickens-lovers who will tell you with obvious conviction that they have met and talked to people who might have sat to Dickens as models for the Artful Dodger or Young Mr. Chivery : which seems quite likely, but which proves nothing, since the merit of Dickens' creations lies, not in their fidelity to any individual, but in their approximation to type.

In the case of Dickens, as in the case of Scott, it is safe to say, as Mr. W. S. Crockett has said in a previous volume in this series, that "the whole question is a somewhat thorny one ;" that Dickens, like Scott, had often "an individual in view, no doubt, but his identity was veiled by the addition of characteristics belonging to a totally different personage or (as often happened) personages" ; that Dickens, like Scott, "painted in 'composites.' The living person he never transferred to his pages simply as he was. That were a violation of the technique of the novelist's art, impossible to a great creative genius ;" that Dickens' characters were like Scott's, "his own

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matchless creation. He first lived among them. He had gone through the length and breadth of the country and had met after a friendly fashion with all the conditions of life which are so happily reflected in his resplendent mirror. That everything is so real, so true to life, so exquisitely touched with the 'rare sweet glamour of humanity.'"

But that Dickens was deeply influenced by certain persons with whom he had been on terms of intimacy in his earlier days, that his outlook upon life was affected by his feelings toward those persons, and that, finally, he did use and exploit the superficial mannerisms of some of his acquaintances and friends, is, I think, demonstrably true. At any rate, it is the purpose of this book to establish that theory.

CHAPTER THE SECOND
OF TWO WOMEN : I. MARIA
BEADNELL



CHAPTER THE SECOND OF TWO WOMEN: I. MARIA BEADNELL

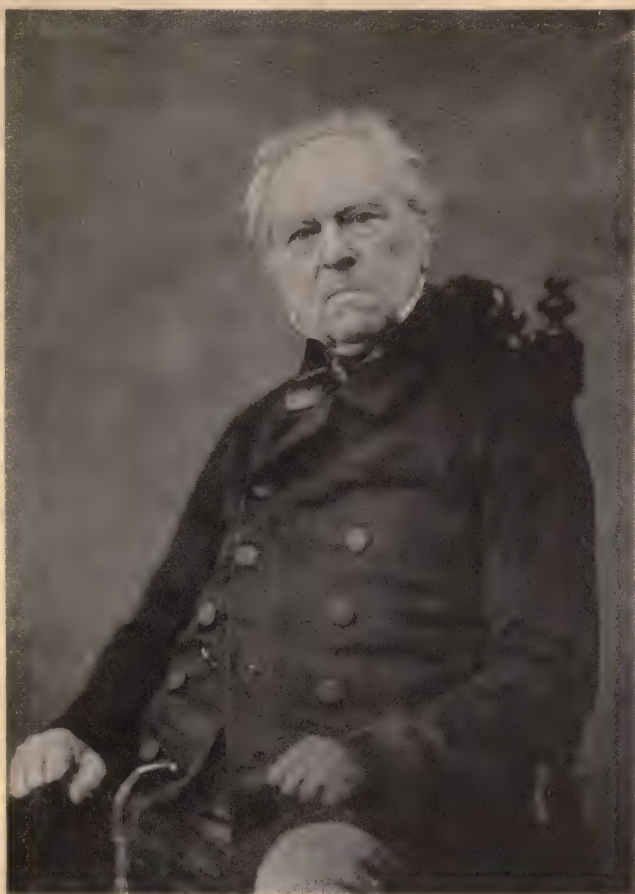
THERE ARE SOME JOLTERHEADS who hold that Realism and Idealism are as the poles asunder; that no Realist can be an Idealist; that every Realist is of necessity a Pessimist and every Idealist a heaven-born Optimist; that the Real is always depressing and unlovely and the Ideal always exhilarating and visionary. As if there were not such real things in the world as mother-love and moonshine, sunshine and the way of a man with a maid, art and music, the call of the sea, friendship, heroism, faith, hope and charity! Dickens was at once a Realist and an Idealist. He only differed from some English disciples of the French Naturalistic School of Fiction in that whilst they seem to prefer to stoop and sniff and examine the manure at the root of the tree he preferred to stand erect and rejoice in the beauty and inhale the perfume of the rose.

There are no villains more villainous than his; yet even to Quilp he gives a sense of humour; and I have always felt that Bill Sikes could not have been wholly bad, or he would not have kept a dog, and that he must have had his rare moments of tenderness (of which, no doubt, he was heartily ashamed) or Nancy would not have loved him so. Dickens only failed as a Realist when his sense of humour failed, as it did sometimes—in the ardour of propaganda, in the lame conclusions of most of

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his novels, and in his depiction of some of his heroes and heroines. Harry and Rose Maylie, Nicholas Nickleby and Madeline Bray, Edward Chester and Emma Haredale, Walter Gay and Florence Dombey : these are all lay figures, mere walking gentlemen and leading ladies of melodrama, the conventional dummies of tradition, conventionally fine, conventionally beautiful, conventionally eloquent, and—like most conventions—utterly unconvincing. They move among the other characters, all vital and arrestive, like grey shadows. They are indeed the shadows of a dream : a dream that Dickens implicitly believed in : a dream that was to him no dream but a reality.

Dickens was a man of few illusions : therein lay the strength of his realism ; but such illusions as he had he clung to with the tenacity of a child : and therein lay the weakness of his idealism. He clung to the illusion that there did exist in the world women who were, humanly speaking, perfect. He was firmly convinced that he had met at least one, and perhaps two such women in his youth. And out of this conviction grew his almost pathetic faith in the idea that somewhere, in some undiscovered corner of the earth, there might be a perfect man also. "At least," he seems to have said to himself, "I will give mankind the benefit of the doubt. It can at any rate do no harm to assume the existence of my ideal. There were



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"Baythorn"

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great men before Agamemnon ; there may have been good men since Christ." That was in the first flush of his manhood.

But presently, as his circle of acquaintance widened, as his field of observation was enlarged, as his knowledge of human nature increased, and still his ideal man refused to materialise, his faith in that glorious figment began to droop and languish. After Edward Chester, who hardly contrives to breathe, there is only Walter Gay—and he was meant to be somebody else. Thenceforth, from the birth of Martin Chuzzlewit to the supposed death of John Harmon on the cold slimy stones of the riverside causeway, we have only the most fleeting glimpses of this ideal man. It is true that he flickers up into a feeble semblance of life in the resurrection of John Rokesmith, but only to be ruthlessly murdered as Edwin Drood. So he died and was buried. But one of Dickens' ideal women, though she died—died without ever having lived—was never buried. The other ideal woman had the misfortune to descend from heaven to earth ; and, meeting her old admirer for the first time in the flesh, was at one stroke made both mortal and immortal by his genius.

Her name was Maria Beadnell, and she was a very real person indeed. Her father, George Beadnell, had two other daughters, Margaret and Anne. He was one of two brothers, the other

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named John. They were bankers who, in 1830, lived and carried on their trade at No. 2 Lombard Street.

I have a fancy, based on a pretty extensive knowledge of Dickens' well-known passion for authenticity in the matter of backgrounds and his meticulous methods in describing them, that this old-fashioned business house figures, in regard to the official part of it, as Tellson's Bank in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and also, in regard to its domestic side, as the Aladdin's palace occupied for one night only by Ralph Nickleby. It is true that neither of these interiors belongs to the locality of Lombard Street: but then it was Dickens' way to take liberties with topography, as with the physical peculiarities of people, in his desire to achieve certain effects. There is at least this circumstance in support of my theory: that the Beadnell's business house was the only old-fashioned business house of that particular type which Dickens knew intimately; and that, when he knew it, he had had so little experience of luxury, and was, moreover, in such a state of exaltation, as to be unduly impressed by its magnificence.

He describes the official premises thus:

"Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place. . . . It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an old-fashioned place, moreover, in the moral attribute that the partners in the House were proud of its

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smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness. They were even boastful of its eminence in those particulars, and were fired by an express conviction that, if it were less objectionable, it would be less respectable. This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might ; but Tellson's thank Heaven !—

“ Any one of these partners would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's. . . . Thus it had come to pass that Tellson's was the triumphant perfection of inconvenience. After bursting open a door of idiotic obstinacy with a weak rattle in its throat, you fell into Tellson's down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters, where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it, while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows, which . . . weremade the dingier by their own iron bars. . . . If your business necessitated your seeing ‘the House,’ you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back, where you meditated on a mis-spent life, until the House came with its hands in its pockets, and you could hardly blink at it in the dismal twilight. Your money came out of, or

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went into, wormy old wooden drawers, particles of which flew up your nose and down your throat when they were opened or shut. Your banknotes had a musty odour, as if they were fast decomposing into rags again. Your plate was stowed away among the neighbouring cesspools, and evil communications corrupted its good polish in a day or two. Your deeds got into extemporised strong-rooms made of kitchens and sculleries, and fretted out all the fat from their parchments into the banking-house air. Your lighter boxes of family papers went upstairs into a Barmecide room, that always had a great dining-table in it, and never had a dinner."

It was very likely in this Barmecide room that Dickens first met Maria Beadnell; but to him the whole house may have reeked of opulence, and he, like Kate Nickleby, may have been "perfectly absorbed in amazement at the richness and splendour of the furniture. The softest and most elegant carpets, the most exquisite pictures, the costliest mirrors; articles of richest ornament, quite dazzling from their beauty and perplexing from the prodigality with which they were scattered around. . . . The very staircase nearly down to the hall door, was crammed with beautiful and luxurious things, as though the house were brim-full of riches, which, with a very trifling addition, would fairly run over into the street."

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The Beadnells seem to have been hospitable folk who loved to entertain their friends. And probably it was for the sake of the three girls that most of the guests who came to that queer old house were young. Margaret, the eldest daughter, was courted by one David Lloyd, who eventually married her in 1831. The second girl, Anne, espoused a friend of Dickens, Henry Kolle, and became Mrs. Kolle in 1833. Both these young men were of the prosperous middle-class, steady, diligent, eager to get on in the world, and so likely to find favour in the eyes of the well-to-do banker. Both their love-affairs were in the budding stage when Kolle introduced his friend, Charles Dickens, to the Beadnell household.

At that time Dickens was a mere youth of seven-teen or eighteen. Having grown dissatisfied with his prospects in the law, he had recently made up his mind to qualify himself for the vocation that his father had lately adopted : that of a newspaper parliamentary reporter.

“ He set resolutely therefore to the study of shorthand ; and, for the additional help of such general information about books as a fairly educated youth might be expected to have, as well as to satisfy some higher personal cravings, he became an assiduous attendant at the British Museum reading-room. . . . Of the difficulties that beset his shorthand studies, as well as of what first turned his mind to them, he has told some-

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thing in *Copperfield*. He had heard that many men distinguished in various pursuits had begun life by reporting debates in Parliament, and he was not deterred by a friend's warning that the mere mechanical accomplishment for excellence in it might take a few years to master thoroughly, 'a perfect and entire command of the mystery of shorthand writing and reading being about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages.' Undaunted, he plunged into it, self-teaching in this as in graver things; and, having bought Mr. Gurney's half-guinea book, worked steadily his way through its distractions.

"The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in the wrong place, not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters, the most despotic characters I have ever known, who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink skyrocket stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I

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found that they had driven everything else out of it ; then, beginning again, I forgot them ; while I was picking them up I dropped the other fragments of the system ; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.' ”

But “ what it was that made it not quite heart-breaking to the hero of fiction its readers know (says Forster in his only mention of Miss Beadnell, whose name he seems never to have heard). And something of the same kind was now to enter into the actual experience of its writer. . . . He, too, had his Dora, at apparently the same hopeless elevation ; striven for as the one only thing to be attained, and even more unattainable, for neither did he succeed nor happily did she die ; but the one idol, like the other, supplying a motive to exertion at the time, and otherwise opening out to the idolator, both in fact and fiction, a highly unsubstantial, happy, foolish time. I used to laugh and tell him I had no belief in any but the book Dora, until the incident of the sudden reappearance of the real one in his life, nearly six years after *Copperfield* was written, convinced me there had been a more actual foundation for those chapters of his book than I was ready to suppose. Still I would hardly admit it ; and, that the matter could possibly affect him then, persisted in a stout refusal to believe. His reply (1855) throws a little light on this juvenile part of his career, and I therefore venture to preserve it.

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“ ‘I don’t quite apprehend what you mean by my overrating the strength of the feeling of five-and-twenty years ago. If you mean of my own feeling, and will only think what the desperate intensity of my nature is, and that this began when I was Charley’s age; that it excluded every other idea from my mind for four years, at a time of life when four years are equal to four times four; and that I went at it with a determination to overcome all the difficulties, which fairly lifted me up into newspaper life, and floated me away over a hundred men’s heads; then you are wrong, because nothing can exaggerate that. I have positively stood amazed at myself ever since!

“ ‘And so I suffered, and so worked, and so beat and hammered away at the maddest romances that ever got into any boy’s head and stayed there, that to see the mere cause of it all now loosens my hold upon myself. Without for a moment sincerely believing that it would have been better if we had never got separated, I cannot see the occasion of so much emotion as I should see in anyone else. No one can imagine in the most distant degree what pain the recollection gave me in *Copperfield*. And just as I can never open that book as I open any other book, I cannot see the face (even at four-and-forty), or hear the voice, without going wandering away over the ashes of all that youth and hope in the wildest manner.’

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“ More and more plainly seen, however, in the light of four-and-forty, the romance glided visibly away, its work being fairly done ; and at the close of the month following that in which this letter was written, during which he had very quietly made a formal call at his youthful Dora’s house, and contemplated with a calm equanimity, in the hall, her stuffed favourite Jip, he began the fiction in which there was a Flora to set against its predecessor’s Dora, both derived from the same original. The fancy had a comic humour in it he found it impossible to resist, but it was kindly and pleasant to the last ; and if the later picture showed him plenty to laugh at in this retrospect of his youth, there is nothing he thought of more tenderly than the earlier, as long as he was conscious of anything.”

So, it is seen that Dickens had fallen in love with the dainty, petite Maria Beadnell, whose seems to have been in many respects a charming girl, but an inveterate coquette. She, attracted by this romantic boy of the glowing, flashing eyes, flirted with him, practised all her maiden arts upon his youthful susceptibility, led him on and eluded him, was towardly and coy, everything in turns and nothing long.

What was she like? We catch our first glimpse of her, I think, in the sturdy staunch old locksmith’s house in *Barnaby Rudge*. Her roguish

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beauty beams at us from the looking-glass of Dolly Varden. She had "a face lighted up by the loveliest pair of sparkling eyes . . . the face of a pretty, laughing girl, dimpled and fresh and healthful—the very impersonation of good-humour and blooming beauty." She strikes her admirer, Joe Willet, "quite dumb with her beauty . . . in all the glow and grace of youth, with all her charms increased a hundredfold by a most becoming dress, by a thousand little coquettish ways which nobody could assume with a better grace . . ." And "there she was again, the very pink and pattern of good looks, in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same drawn over her head, and upon the top of that hood a little straw hat trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons and worn the merest trifle on one side—just enough, in short, to make it the wickedest and most provoking head-dress that ever malicious milliner devised. And not to speak of the manner in which these cherry-coloured decorations brightened her eyes, or vied with her lips, or shed a new bloom on her face, she wore such a cruel little muff, and such a heartrending pair of shoes, and was so surrounded and hemmed in, as it were, by aggravations of all kinds, that when Mr. Tappertit, holding the horse's head, saw her come out of the house alone, such impulses came over him to decoy her into the chaise and drive off like mad, that he would unquestionably have done it, but

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for certain uneasy doubts besetting him as to the shortest way to Gretna Green."

Again, on a certain fine bright night, Dolly, for all her lowness of spirits, "kept looking up at the stars in a manner so bewitching (and *she* knew it) that Joe was clean out of his senses, and plainly showed that if ever a man were—not to say over head and ears, but over the Monument and the top of St. Paul's in love, that man was himself. The road was a very good one; not at all a jolting road, or an uneven one; and yet Dolly held the side of the chaise with one little hand, all the way. If there had been an executioner behind him with an uplifted axe ready to chop off his head if he touched that hand, Joe couldn't have helped doing it. From putting his own hand upon it as if by chance, and taking it away again after a minute or so, he got to riding along without taking it off at all; as if he, the escort, were bound to do that as an important part of his duty, and had come out for the purpose. The most curious circumstance about this little incident was that Dolly didn't seem to know of it. She looked so innocent and unconscious when she turned her eyes on Joe, that it was quite provoking.

"She talked though, talked about her fright, and about Joe's coming up to rescue her, and about her gratitude, and about her fear that she might not have thanked him enough, and about their always being friends from that time forth—and

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about all that sort of thing. And when Joe said, not friends he hoped, Dolly was quite surprised and said not enemies she hoped ; and when Joe said, couldn't they be something much better than either, Dolly all of a sudden found out a star which was brighter than all the other stars, and begged to call his attention to the same, and was ten thousand times more innocent and unconscious than ever."

I think there can be no doubt that Dolly Varden was founded on Maria Beadnell. She was really the first girl, the first *ingenue*, that Dickens succeeded in investing with any semblance of life. And she came into being just long enough after the period of his youthful infatuation to be handled with delicacy and at the same time with fond playfulness. Later on, when Dickens was at his apogee, he boldly, lovingly idealised her ; and of all his idealised women Dora Spenslow is the only one who interests us. It will be seen that she bears a close resemblance to Dolly Varden, although she is of altogether finer texture, simple and artless, single-minded and sincere.

"She was (says David Copperfield, Dickens' mouthpiece) more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't know what she was—anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted. . . I don't remember who was there, except Dora. I have not the least idea what we had for dinner, besides Dora. My im-

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pression is that I dined off Dora entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next to her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery. She was rather diminutive altogether. So much the more precious, I thought. . . . I never saw such curls—how could I, for there never were such curls?—as those she shook out to hide her blushes. As to the straw hat with blue ribbons which was on the top of the curls, if I could only have hung it up in my room in Buckingham Street, what a priceless possession it would have been. . . .

“All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction! . . . I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant. There was no pausing on the brink; no looking down or looking back; I was gone, headlong. . . .

“Within the first week of my passion I bought four sumptuous waistcoats—not for myself; *I* had no pride in them; for Dora—and took to wearing straw-coloured kid gloves in the streets, and laid the foundations of all the corns I have ever had. If the boots I wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was in a most affecting manner. . . .

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"I don't think I had any definite idea where Dora came from, or in what degree she was related to a higher order of beings; but I am quite sure I should have scouted the notion of her being simply human, like any other young lady, with indignation and contempt. If I may so express it I was steeped in Dora. I was not merely over head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through. Enough love might have been wrung out of me, metaphorically speaking, to drown anybody in; and yet there would have remained enough within me, and all over me, to pervade my entire existence."

So far the story follows the events of that period of green-sickness; but Dickens' imagination overleaps the bounds of actual cold experience and he pictures that impossibly ecstatic moment of the realisation of his boyish dream.

"I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I had Dora in my arms. I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolised and worshipped her. . . . When Dora hung her head and cried and trembled, my eloquence increased so much the more. If she would like me to die for her she had but to say the word and I was ready. Life without Dora's love was not a thing to have upon any terms. I couldn't bear it, and I wouldn't. I had loved her every minute, day and night, since

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I first saw her. I loved her at that moment to distraction. I should always love her, every minute, to distraction. Lovers had loved before, and lovers would love again ; but no lover had ever loved, might, could, would, or should ever love, as I loved Dora . . . I suppose we had some notion that this was to end in marriage. We must have had some, because Dorastipulated that we were never to be married without her papa's consent. But, in our youthful ecstasy, I don't think that we really looked before us or behind us ; or had any aspiration beyond the ignorant present. . . . What an idle time it was ! What an unsubstantial, happy, foolish time it was ! . . . Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospect I can smile at half so much, or think of half so tenderly."

We are vouchsafed other glimpses of this fairy-like figure, growing ever more and more unreal and indistinct, as the child-wife, trying to be a woman.

" ' Oh, what a weary boy ! ' said Dora one night, when I met her eyes as I was shutting up my desk.

" ' What a weary girl ! ' said I. ' That's more to the purpose. You must go to bed another time, my love. It's far too late for you. '

" ' No, don't send me to bed ! ' pleaded Dora, coming to my side. ' Pray don't do that. '

" ' Dora ! ' .

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"To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck.

" 'Not well, my dear! not happy!'

" 'Yes, quite well, and very happy!' said Dora. 'But say you'll let me stop and see you write.'

" 'Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!' I replied.

" 'Are they bright, though?' returned Dora, laughing. 'I'm so glad they're bright.'

" 'Little Vanity!' said I.

" 'But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I knew that very well, before she told me so.

" 'If you think them pretty, say I may always stop and see you write!' said Dora. '*Do* you think them pretty?'

" 'Very pretty.'

" 'Then let me always stop and see you write.'

" 'I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora.'

" 'Yes, it will! Because, you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, when you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind if I say something very, very silly?—more than usual?' inquired Dora, peeping over my shoulder into my face.

" 'What wonderful thing is that?' said I.

" 'Please let me hold the pens,' said Dora. 'I want to have something to do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the pens?'"



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"Dolly Varden" and other characters

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And in the end she fades away. She does not die, but rather seems to pass into the region of those radiant shadows to which she belongs.

"It is night; and I am with her still. . . . We are now alone.

"Do I know now that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts; but I am far from sure that I have taken that truth to heart. . . .

"I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying, lately. . . . Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young.'

"I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes and speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel, with a stricken heart, that she is speaking of herself as past.

"I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience and thoughts and everything. I was such a silly little creature! I am afraid it would have been better if we had only loved one another as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife.'

"I try to stay my tears, and to reply, 'Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be a husband!'

"I don't know,' with the old shake of her curls. 'Perhaps! But if I had been more fit to be married, I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was.'

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“‘We have been very happy, my sweet Dora.’

“‘I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn’t have improved. It is better as it is.’

“‘Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a reproach.’ . . .

“‘Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! . . . I said that it was better as it is!’ she whispers, as she holds me in her arms. ‘Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is.’”

In the light of Dickens’ later experience of his boyish ideal, Maria Beadnell, these last words seem prophetic.

It was much better as it was. It was much better that not only should Maria’s coquetry stand in the way of their union, but that her father should also look with disfavour upon the suit of a mere newspaper reporter. George Beadnell seems to have known his daughter well. He seems to have known that she was in no danger of succumbing to the fascinations of her comely but impecunious

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young wooer. So he permits the flirtation to go on for a time, standing aside and watching its progress with cynical amusement. Then, suddenly, as the affair takes on a graver complexion, ceases to be merely amusing and threatens to become serious, he steps in, declares that all this folly must end, and forbids Dickens his house.

Dickens, in exile, returns "the little present" that Maria had once given him, with these words:

"A wish for your happiness, although it comes from me, may not be the worse for being sincere and heartfelt. Accept it as it is meant, and believe that nothing will afford me more real delight than to hear that you, the object of my first and my last love, are happy. If you are as happy as I hope you may be, you will indeed possess every blessing that this world can afford."

For a while they corresponded, through the agency of Kolle, who acted as love's messenger and smuggled Dickens' letters past the parental barriers into the hands of Maria. Kolle, then, although he appears in none of the official biographies, was a close friend of Dickens. He died thirty years ago, and only recently have Dickens' letters to him and to Maria Beadnell* been published—in America. It is from these letters that

* *Charles Dickens and Maria Beadnell*: Private Correspondence between Charles Dickens and Mrs. Henry Winter (née Maria Beadnell), the original of Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield* and Flora Finching in *Little Dorrit*.—The Earliest Letters of Charles Dickens: Written to his friend, Henry Kolle.

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one learns of Dickens' early passion and blighted hopes. He opened his heart to Kolle. In the first letter of the former series he apologises to his friend for not having kept an appointment. He asks him to make another. "I fear," he says, "until the House is up (Dickens was then in the press gallery of the House of Commons) I can name no certain night on which I can go to the play, except Saturday." The letter ends "with my best remembrances to (?)." The letter was most likely written in the spring of 1830, and so it is fairly evident that "(?)" means Maria Beadnell.

In another letter to Kolle he says :

"I would really feel some delicacy in asking you again to deliver the enclosed as addressed, were it not for two reasons. In the first place you know so well my existing situation that you must be almost perfectly aware of the general nature of the note, and in the second I should not have written it, for I should have communicated its contents verbally, were it not that I lost the opportunity of keeping the old gentleman out of the way as long as possible last night. To these reasons you may add that I have not the slightest objection to your knowing its contents from the first syllable to the last. I trust under these circumstances that you will not object to doing me the very essential service of delivering the enclosed as soon this afternoon as you can, and perhaps you will accompany the

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delivery by asking Miss Beadnell only to read it when she is quite alone. Of course in this sense I consider you as nobody."

That letter was answered by the coquette, who was still loth to relinquish her last hold upon her would-be lover. But the tone of her responses grows ever colder and colder, until in despair poor Dickens writes thus to Kolle :

"I enclose a very conciliatory note, Sans Pride, Sans Reserve, Sans anything but an evident wish to be reconciled. . . . By the way, if I had many friends in the habit of marrying, which friends had brothers who possessed an extensive assortment of choice hock, I should be dead in no time. . . . Yesterday I felt like a maniac, to-day my interior resembles a lime-basket."

To this "conciliatory note," which is not preserved, the reply was "cold and reproachful." Dickens was finally dismissed by his captious mistress. "Least said soonest mended," he writes to Kolle in his only laconic comment on the unhappy termination of the affair. But, later on, he writes again to Maria out of the depths of his bruised heart : " I have never loved, and I never can love, any human creature breathing but yourself. We have had many differences, and we have lately been entirely separated. Absence, however, has not altered my feelings in the slightest

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degree, and the love I now tender you is as pure and as lasting as at any period of our former correspondence."

So, one poor dream was ended, and another more splendid dream began . . . to continue until the year 1855, when Dickens again met the lady of his early adoration, married now to a Mr. Henry Winter ; and then he awoke as with a start from his long beautiful dream to find himself, cold and alone and naked, a little ashamed of his former self and laughing fretfully, in the bleak outer darkness of disillusion.

Mrs. Henry Winter, who had once been Miss Maria Beadnell, but who had never been the woman of Dickens' ideal, lives for the first time, as she lived in the flesh, as Flora Finching in *Little Dorrit*. Dickens' new stalking-horse is now the rather shadowy and tedious Clennam. Clennam goes to the house of the Patriarchal humbug Casby, and there meets Flora after many years of separation. His "eyes no sooner fell upon the subject of his old passion, than it shivered and broke to pieces.

"Most men (the narrative goes on) will be found sufficiently true to themselves to be true to an old idea. It is no proof of an inconstant mind, but exactly the opposite, when the idea will not bear close comparison with the reality, and the contrast is a fatal shock to it. Such was Clennam's

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case. In his youth he had ardently loved this woman, and had heaped upon her all the locked-up wealth of his affection and imagination. That wealth had been, in his desert home, like Robinson Crusoe's money ; exchangeable with no one, lying idle in the dark to rust, until he poured it out for her. Ever since that memorable time . . . he had kept the old fancy of the Past unchanged, in its old sacred place. And now, after all, the last of the Patriarchs coolly walked into the parlour, saying in effect, 'Be good enough to throw it down and dance upon it. This is Flora.'

"Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath ; but that was not much. Flora, whom he had left a lily, had become a peony ; but that was not much. Flora, who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow."

"This is Flora !"

Poor Flora ! Poor Dickens !

She ogles him, she angles for compliments (which he good-humouredly pays her), she tosses her head and giggles and bridles, is ridiculously arch and coy and girlish, dwells romantically upon the vanished past, and languishes at him. And all the while she talks and talks and talks, "running on with astonishing speed, and pointing her

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conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them." "Was it possible (asks Dickens in the person of Clennam) that Flora could have been such a chatterer in the days she referred to? Could there have been anything like her present disjointed volubility in the fascinations that had captivated him?"

"... I assure you, Flora (says her old lover), I am happy in seeing you once more, and in finding that, like me, you have not forgotten the old foolish dreams, when we saw all before us in the light of our youth and hope."

"You don't seem so," pouted Flora, "you take it very coolly, but however I know you are disappointed in me... perhaps I am the cause myself. It's just as likely."

"No, no," Clennam entreated, "don't say that."

"Oh, I must, you know," said Flora, in a positive tone, "what nonsense not to, I know I am not what you expected, I know that very well."

In the midst of her rapidity she had found that out with the quick perception of a cleverer woman. The inconsistent and profoundly unreasonable way in which she instantly went on, nevertheless, to interweave their long-abandoned boy and girl relations with their present interview, made Clennam feel as if he were lightheaded. . . .

He tried at parting to give his hand in frankness to the existing Flora—not the vanished

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Flora . . but Flora wouldn't have it, couldn't have it, was wholly destitute of the power of separating herself and him from their bygone characters. He left the house miserably enough. . . .

He could not walk on thinking for ten minutes, without recalling Flora. She necessarily recalled to him his life, with all its misdirection and little happiness . . . so long, so bare, so blank. No childhood, no youth, except for one remembrance ; that one remembrance proved only that day to be a piece of folly.

It was a misfortune to him, trifle as it might have been to another. For while all that was hard and stern in his recollection remained reality on being proved—was obdurate to the sight and touch, and relaxed nothing of its old indomitable grimness—the one tender recollection of his experience would not bear the same test, and melted away. . . .

He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without . . . and . . . this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity. And this saved him still from the whimpering weakness and cruel selfishness of holding that because such a happiness or such a virtue had not come into his little path, or worked well for him, therefore it was not in the great scheme, but was reducible, when found in appear-

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ance, to the basest elements. A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could rise into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it.

Therefore he sat before his dying fire, sorrowful to think upon the way by which he had come to that night, yet not strewing poison on the way by which other men had come to it. That he should have missed so much, and at his time of life should look so far about him for any staff to bear him company upon his downward journey and cheer it, was a just regret. He looked at the fire from which the blaze departed, from which the after-glow subsided, in which the ashes turned grey, from which they dropped to dust, and thought, "How soon I too shall pass through such changes and be gone!"

To review his life was like descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off one by one, as he came down towards them.

From that moment of his great disillusion Dickens was a changed man. He was so greatly changed that his art was perceptibly affected. Never again does he recapture his old careless mastery over his material. It is as if, from that time onward, he is forced, almost against his will, to examine and criticise the healthy, hearty ideals

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of his youth : his youth that has lasted in the full bloom of its virginal innocence until now, and even now is only a little faded, a little sere. But what he has lost in buoyancy he has gained in steadiness ; what he has lost in lightness of heart he has gained in depth of insight and intensity of feeling. He does not forget that idyll of his youth, or the wanton maid who was its heroine ; but he remembers, he wears his rue, with a difference. He remembers the pain as well as the ecstasy, and he raises the corpse of his old love from the dead in the person of Estella in *Great Expectations*, which was his next novel—as distinct from his romance *A Tale of Two Cities* and his later Christmas stories—after *Little Dorrit*.

Pip is Estella's victim. She scorns him in his coarse boyhood, on one occasion slaps his face, and on every occasion flouts him. He meets her again in early manhood in the house where he had first made her acquaintance. He believes that it was reserved for him to marry Estella and to "restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a-going and the cold hearths a-blazing . . . in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of Romance, and marry the Princess" . . . Estella !

He pauses to look at the house.

. . . its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of

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chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration and the heart of it, of course. But, though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all, I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all, I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.

And in the record of what happened between Pip and his Estella we catch an echo of the story of those sad relations which had once existed between Charles Dickens himself and Maria Beadnell.

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I suffered (says Pip) every kind and degree of torture that Estella could cause me. The nature of my relations with her, which placed me on terms of familiarity without placing me on terms of favour, conduced to my distraction. She made use of me to tease other admirers, and she turned the very familiarity between herself and me to the account of putting a constant slight on my devotion to her. If I had been her secretary, steward, half-brother, poor relation—if I had been a younger brother of her appointed husband—I could not have seemed to myself further from my hopes when I was nearest to her. The privilege of calling her by her name and hearing her call me by mine became under the circumstances an aggravation of my trials ; and while I think it likely that it almost maddened her other lovers, I knew too certainly that it almost maddened me.

She had admirers without end. No doubt my jealousy made an admirer of everyone who went near her ; but there were more than enough of them without that.

I saw her often . . . there were picnics, fête days, plays, operas, concerts, parties, all sorts of pleasures, through which I pursued her—and they were all miseries to me. I never had one hour's happiness in her society, and yet my mind all round the four-and-twenty hours was harping on the happiness of having her with me unto death.

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Dickens wrote one more novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, and therein paints his first really consistent portrait of an average young and pretty girl of the middle class. Bella Wilfer is quite human : the most human of all his heroines. She is not a vain toy like Dolly Varden, or a dainty impossible fairylike Dora Spenlow. She palpitates with life. She is the inevitable product of her environment and her peculiar circumstances. From the moment when she is first presented, "seated on the rug to warm herself, with her brown eyes on the fire and a handful of her brown curls in her mouth," laughing, pouting, and half crying, discontented and rebellious, whimsical and peevish, inclined to be selfish and self-willed ; in all her comically pathetic adventures with her cherubic father ; and throughout her gradual development into a fond and loving wife ; until at last she lays her little right hand on her husband's eyes and says : "Do you remember, John, on the day we weremarried, Pa'sspeaking of the ships that might be sailing towards us from the unknown seas ?" "Perfectly, my darling !" "I think . . . among them . . . there is a ship upon the ocean . . . bringing . . . to you and me . . . a little baby, John."

Always Bella Wilfer is alive. She rescues Dickens from the reproach that he could not depict a typical English girl. For so much added strength and wisdom, so much perfected artistry,

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had his Disillusion taught Dickens in the last few years of his life. For so much, then, should we be grateful to the lady of his first great passion, Maria Beadnell, the memory of whom kept bright so many years his ideal of womanhood, and only shattered that ideal when he was old enough to have acquired a little philosophy.



MARY HOGARTH

"Kate Nickleby" and other characters

CHAPTER THE THIRD
OF TWO WOMEN: II. MARY
HOGARTH

CHAPTER THE THIRD OF TWO WOMEN; II. MARY HOGARTH

MARIA BEADNELL, DICKENS' LESSER ideal woman, as we have seen, came to earth in his later years, and shattered the golden web of illusion that he had spun about her. But Dickens' greater ideal woman died in her girlhood. Her epitaph, written by Dickens, is still to be seen upon her gravestone in the cemetery at Kensal Green, and runs: "Young, beautiful, and good, God numbered her among his angels at the early age of seventeen."

Her name was Mary Hogarth. She was the next youngest sister of Dickens' wife. Immediately after the young couple's honeymoon, Dickens and his bride returned to London and made their home at No. 15 Furnival's Inn. There Mary Hogarth often stayed, indeed practically lived, with them, her bright wit and amiable disposition proving an inexhaustible source of joyful refreshment in the little household. Her premature death so unnerved Dickens that the course of *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist* (produced almost simultaneously) was temporarily interrupted. Writing some few weeks afterwards to Mrs. Hogarth from his next abode, he said: "I wish you could know how I weary now for the three rooms in Furnival's Inn, and how I miss that pleasant smile and those sweet words which, bestowed upon our evening's work, on our merry banterings round the

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fire, were more precious to me than the applause of a whole world would be."

"His grief and suffering were intense (says Forster, corroboratively), and affected him, as will be seen, through many after years."

In 1841 his wife's younger brother "died with the same unexpected suddenness that had attended her younger sister's death; and the event had followed close upon the decease of Mrs. Hogarth's mother while on a visit to her daughter and Mr. Hogarth."

In reference to these fresh bereavements Dickens wrote :

As no steps had been taken towards the funeral, I thought it best at once to bestir myself . . . It is a great trial to me to give up Mary's grave; greater than I can possibly express. I thought of moving her to the catacombs, and saying nothing about it; but then I remembered that the poor old lady is buried next her at her own desire, and could not find it in my heart, directly she is laid in the earth, to take her grandchild away. The desire to be buried next her is as strong upon me now as it was five years ago; and I *know* (for I don't think there ever was love like that I bear her) that it will never diminish. I fear I can do nothing. Do you think I can? They would move her on Wednesday, if I resolved to have it done. I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust; and yet I feel that her brothers and sisters, and her

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mother, have a better right than I to be placed beside her. It is but an idea. I neither think nor hope (God forbid) that our spirits would ever mingle *there*. I ought to get the better of it, but it is very hard. I never contemplated this—and coming so suddenly, and after being ill, it disturbs me more than it ought. It seems like losing her a second time. . . . There is no ground on either side to be had. I must give it up. I shall drive over there, please God, on Thursday morning, before they get there ; and look at her coffin.

A year later, during his first tour in America, Dickens visited Niagara, and from an hotel there writes thus : “ What would I give if the dear girl, whose ashes lie in Kensal Green, had lived to come so far along with us—but she has been here many times, I doubt not, since her sweet face faded from my earthly sight.”

Again, two years later, he writes from Venice, telling how he fell asleep, during an attack of sickness, and dreamed a dream.

In an indistinct place, which was quite sublime in its indistinctness, I was visited by a Spirit. I could not make out the face, nor do I recollect that I desired to do so. It wore a blue drapery, as the Madonna might in a picture by Raphael ; and bore no resemblance to anyone I have known except in stature. I think (but I am not sure) that I recognised the voice. Anyway, I knew it was poor Mary's spirit. I was not at all afraid, but in a great

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delight, so that I wept very much, and stretching out my arms to it called it "Dear." At this, I thought it recoiled ; and I felt immediately, that not being of my gross nature, I ought not to have addressed it so familiarly, "Forgive me!" I said. "We poor living creatures are only able to express ourselves by looks and words. I have used the word most natural to *our* affections ; and you know my heart." It was so full of compassion and sorrow for me—which I knew spiritually, for, as I have said, I did not perceive its emotions from its face—that it cut me to the heart ; and I said, sobbing, "O ! give me some token that you have really visited me." "Form a wish," it said. I thought, reasoning with myself: "If I form a selfish wish it will vanish." So I hastily discarded such hopes and anxieties of my own as came into my mind, and said, "Mrs. Hogarth is surrounded with great distresses"—observe, I never thought of saying "your mother" as to a mortal creature—"will you extricate her?" "Yes." "And her extrication is to be a certainty to me that this has really happened?" "Yes." "But answer me one other question!" I said, in an agony of entreaty lest it should leave me. "What is the true religion?" As it paused a moment without replying, I said—Good God, in such an agony of haste, lest it should go away !—"You think as I do that the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good ?—or," I said, observing that it still hesitated, and was

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moved with the greatest compassion for me, "perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more steadily?" "For *you*," said the Spirit, full of such heavenly tenderness for me that I felt as if my heart would break, "for *you* it is the best!" Then I awoke, with the tears running down my face, and myself in exactly the condition of the dream.

And again, from Devonshire Terrace, in the midst of a letter on indifferent topics, he reverts to his sorrow with tragic suddenness, in the words: "This day, eleven years ago, poor Mary died."

And yet again, in the very year of his death, her influence is proved to be as potent upon him as ever. Again he speaks of her in that tone of unconquerable regret.

She is so much in my thoughts at all times (he says), especially when I am successful, and have greatly prospered in anything, that the recollection of her is an essential part of my being, and is as inseparable from my existence as the beating of my heart is.

To some it may seem that there is a taint of morbidity in all this gloomy obsession. But . . . was it a gloomy obsession?

"It is not in the nature of pure love (says Dickens in *Dombey and Son*) to mourn so fiercely and unkindly long."

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Dickens cherished and guarded the memory of this beautiful girl, who had come into and passed out of his life like a visitant from another world, as we cherish and guard the innocence of our children. Her radiant figure stood to him as a type of all the highest possibilities of which mankind, and especially womankind, is capable.

I have said that Dickens clung to his illusions with all the tenacity of a child. He was a man of narrow but acute perceptions. He saw things clearly; but as a rule he saw only one aspect of most things. Wilfully he shut his eyes to the worse side of human nature and life generally. Thus the very squalor of his backgrounds is invariably picturesque; and the very vileness of his evil characters grotesque or whimsical. He could not, would not, dare not believe that there was anything or anybody wholly bad. He fought with all the vigour and earnestness of his sanguine temperament for his conception of a world in which goodness triumphed over badness. He needed always some standard of perfection by which to measure the moral stature of his fellow creatures; and his idealised memory of Mary Hogarth provided him with that standard. As, one by one, his illusions faded, withered, and died; as, one by one, the uglier facts of life obtruded themselves more and more insistently upon him, so he clung the more tenaciously to his faith in the existence of an ideal human being . . . somewhere! It was as necessary to his

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art, as to his perfervid nature, that he should hold that faith unflinchingly.

I think that Dickens was not much given to introspection. He was not of that school of writers which is forever taking out its heart and examining its works and passing it round for others' inspection, like a boy with a new watch. He lived in other, simpler times than these. He worshipped other, simpler gods than the grim forces which the theory of evolution has created. His was a religion of symbols : the symbol of the shrouded body, with its calm still face drained of all grossness, set in an expression of eternal peace ; the symbols of the grave, and the Last Great Day of universal resurrection, the pale shadows of wandering souls in the twilight of that bourne from whence no traveller returns, the Judgment and the shining hosts of Heaven, the lost legions of Hell, God enthroned among his angels, discoursing celestial music.

I think it was all as simple, or almost as simple, as that to the immortal child Dickens. In the dream that he dreamed in Venice, when the Spirit of Mary Hogarth appeared to him in the guise of a conventional Madonna, it may be that we glimpse darkly the gaunt spectres of doubt, misgiving, and inquiry that even in his crowded, hurried life, could not always be gainsaid. But, you will observe that he was ill when that dream came to him. It was only when his brain was sick that his thoughts revolved about the mysteries of Here and Here-

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after. At all other times, at all such times as his thoughts ran easily and smoothly along the old accustomed grooves, he took for granted all that he could not understand, and accepted without cavil or question what was beyond his ready comprehension. His mind worked as an infinitesimal part of a vast and intricate machine with the ulterior parts of which he had no earthly concern. And some sort of spiritual ideal is as necessary to the health of simple souls of that calibre as oxygen is necessary to the health of the body.

The analogue of the parent and child recurs and clamours for further consideration. To the best types of father and mother there is no more agonising moment than that in which the child ceases to be a child, discards its last vestures of childhood, and suddenly becomes a queer sort of stranger stalking the house in the likeness of its former self. For the younger generation is always so much more terribly wise than the old. It begins where the old generation ends. The mother, beholding a daughter for the first time in the place of her baby-girl, has an irreparable sense of loss. The father, watching the new-born son that was once his little laughing boy, feels naked as Elijah must have felt after he had cast his mantle upon Elisha. It is a change worse than death. The lost child lies more deeply buried than in the silence of the tomb. And that is why the child, who dies as a child, lives forever as a child in the hearts of its

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parents. That is why the children who die are always so much more beautiful and bright and good than the children who live. That is why, if they had not died, they would have grown into men and women whose like the world has never looked upon.

Dickens believed in the perfect woman because Mary Hogarth died in the dawn of her womanhood. Dickens left his heroines on the steps of the marriage-altar, and fled from the vision of them as wives and mothers, because Mary Hogarth had never husband or child. His heroines, having existed as shadows, stiffened at the last into cold stark outlines, as the shadowy figure of Mary Hogarth, having passed away, stiffened in his memory into a pure cold unearthly thing in a coffin.

In vain he protests that he neither thinks nor hopes that their spirits would ever mingle in the grave. In spite of himself, as it were sub-consciously, he does somehow contrive to think and hope that their spirits will so mingle ; or he would not long so passionately to be laid beside her, or so dread the thought of being excluded from her dust. He would not feel so much satisfaction in the prospect of looking once again upon her coffin.

In his dream of her she bears no resemblance to the bodily form of Mary Hogarth. He is not even sure that he recognises her voice. And this is significant as suggesting that his recollection of her face and form and manner had long since become

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vague. He remembered only the aura of her youth and gaiety and beauty and goodness that had once pervaded his home like a heavenly presence. His fancy could only visualise her in the guise of a conventional Madonna, just as in his novels he could only depict her in the guise of the simpering dolls with whose stereotyped prettiness and colourlessness and mindlessness the fashionable Books of Beauty of that artificial period had no doubt made him familiar.

In his types of folly and wickedness, of jollity, eccentricity, whimsicality, grotesquerie, and hearty simplicity, he was triumphantly successful, because such types did not clash with his ideals. But he could not graft folly on to both dignity and goodness, or beauty on to both wickedness and folly. He could blend niceness with nastiness, as in the case of Carker; he could make his rascals eccentric or whimsical or grotesque; but he could not make them hearty or simple or jolly. To have done any of those things would have been to debase his ideals: to forfeit that most blessed heritage of immortal childishness which made him a genius.

And so he presents to us that galaxy of amazing dolls variously christened Rose Maylie, Kate Nickleby, Madeline Bray, Little Nell, Emma Haredale, Mary Graham, Florence Dombey, Agnes Wickfield, Ada Clare, and Lucy Manette. On the subject of these femininities much bitter black ink has been shed; there has been much

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laughter like the crackling of thorns under the pot of the pot-boiler. Modern criticism has exhausted itself in scathing denunciation of these poor puppets. And yet there is perhaps something to be said in defence of the convention that created them. Dickens was never a self-conscious artist. He had indeed no use for the word Art. And all classicism was Greek to him. Nevertheless, as I say, in this vexed matter of his heroines he proved himself one of the Greeks. They are goddesses all: not the goddesses of the Greek mythology, of course, but the angels of Christianity. They tower above the dear sweet women whom we know and love and reverence as the huge stone effigies in the grounds of the Crystal Palace tower above the little Cockney girls in their sweethearts' arms under the moon of a Bank Holiday night. Devoid of all colour and movement and warmth, gazing out upon the world with sightless eyes, immune from the ills that flesh and blood is heir to, aloof from the petty concerns of every day, immutable, unapproachable, severely correct, at once supremely perfect and supremely uninteresting: they are as inhuman and repellent as they are beautiful, and as little like humanity as they are like the seraphim. But this, which is accounted as a fault in Dickens, is hailed as sublimity in Æschylus or Sophocles. So inevitably does distance lend enchantment to the view.

Yet it must be confessed that these Dickens heroines are great bores, when they are not some-

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thing infinitely worse : that is to say, when they are not used as vehicles for the expression of Dickens' incurable sentimentality. Their only merit consists in their author's ingenuous belief in their inherent attractiveness or in their power of pathetic appeal. And this belief is founded on the solid rock of his faith in a perfected womanhood: a faith that grew out of his illusive memories of that fair frail girl, who died without ever having lived—the Mary of his boyish dream!

She makes her first appearance as Rose Maylie. She is described as being . . . in the lovely bloom and springtime of womanhood; at that age when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be without impiety supposed to abide in such as hers. She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions. The very intelligence that shone in her deep blue eye, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her age, or of the world; and yet the changing expression of sweetness and good humour, the thousand lights that played about the face, and left no shadow there; above all, the smile, the cheerful, happy smile, were made for Home, and fireside peace and happiness. . . . She playfully put back her hair, which was simply braided on

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her forehead ; and threw into her beaming look such an expression of affection and artless loveliness, that blessed spirits might have smiled to look upon her.

That reads uncommonly like a fanciful portrait of Mary Hogarth. She falls ill. And then indeed one finds it hard to forgive Dickens for piling on the agony, as he does, in this wise :

Oh ! the suspense, the fearful, acute suspense, of standing idly by while the life of one we dearly love is trembling in the balance ! Oh, the rack-ing thoughts that crowd upon the mind, and make the heart beat violently, and the breath come thick, by the force of the images they conjure up before it ; the desperate anxiety to be doing something to relieve the pain, or lessen the danger, which we have no power to alleviate ; the sinking of soul and spirit, which the sad remembrance of our helplessness produces ; what tortures can equal these ; what reflections or endeavours can, in the full tide and fever of the time, allay them !

Morning came, and the little cottage was lonely and still. People spoke in whispers ; anxious faces appeared at the gate, from time to time ; women and children went away in tears. . . . "It is hard," said the good doctor, turning away as he spoke ; "so young, so much beloved ; but there is very little hope."

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Another morning. The sun shone brightly : as brightly as if it looked upon no misery or care ; and, with every leaf and flower in full bloom about her : with life and health and sounds and sights of joy surrounding her on every side : the fair young creature lay, wasting fast. . . .

There was such peace and beauty in the scene ; so much of brightness and mirth in the sunny landscape ; such blithesome music in the songs of the summer birds ; such freedom in the rapid flight of the rook, careering overhead ; so much of life and joyousness in all ; that . . . the thought instinctively occurred . . . that this was not a time for death ; that Rose could surely never die when humbler things were all so glad and gay ; that graves were for cold and cheerless winter ; not for sunlight and fragrance . . . that shrouds were for the old and shrunken ; and that they never wrapped the young and graceful form in their ghastly folds.

A knell . . . Another ! Again ! It was tolling for the funeral service. A group of humble mourners entered the gate : wearing white favours ; for the corpse was young. They stood uncovered by a grave ; and there was a mother—a mother once—among the weeping train. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang on.

It is all very crude and unnecessary and rather nauseous. But perhaps Mr. Percy Fitzgerald is



HENRY BURNETT

"Nicholas Nickleby"

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right when he says: "There is such a feeling reality in the author's account of the illness of Rose Maylie that I am convinced the character was drawn from the Mary Hogarth whose loss he had felt so deeply and mourned so passionately. . . . These anxieties that he describes were surely his own personal ones."

That he certainly had Mary Hogarth in his mind when he wrote of the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is plain from his own references to that incident. Writing in anticipation of the chapter in which the death is to be described he says :

. . . this part of the story is not to be galloped over, I can tell you. I think it will come famously—but I am the wretchedest of the wretched. It casts the most horrible shadow upon me, and it is as much as I can do to keep moving at all. I tremble to approach the place a great deal more than Kit ; a great deal more than Mr. Garland ; a great deal more than the Single Gentleman. I shan't recover it for a long time. Nobody will miss her like I shall. It is such a very painful thing to me that I really cannot express my sorrow. Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it : what the actual doing it will be, God knows. I can't preach to myself the schoolmaster's consolation, though I try. Dear Mary died yesterday when I think of this sad story.

And, five days later, the deed done, he writes

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that he had "resolved to try and do something which might be read by people about whom death had been, with a softened feeling, and with consolation." And certainly he has this justification that, among the more unsophisticated of his readers, he succeeded in his endeavour.

But there is no purpose to be achieved in enlarging unduly upon this theme, now that the identity of Mary Hogarth with Rose Maylie, Little Nell, and a whole train of similar characters has been established. Skipping the intervening books, all of which are haunted more or less by the ghost of Mary Hogarth, reference need only be made, I think, to the book in which it is said that her sister, Georgina Hogarth, takes her place.

In the Agnes Wickfield of *David Copperfield* we have her apotheosis: the apotheosis of the female prig and bore. This pale feeble figment whom he apostrophises thus: "Oh, Agnes, oh my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when Realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!" this bloodless creature, who never told her love, but let concealment, like a worm in the bud, prey on her damask cheek; this pale shadow of an outworn ideal, "pointing ever upward," is the last word in insipidity. Fortunately she was not sufficiently alive to die in the book. But—which is even more fortunate—neither was she sufficiently alive to sur-

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vive the interval between that book and Dickens' next. Ada Clare of *Bleak House* is indeed a poor thing ; but scratch her and she does seem to bleed a sort of thin milky fluid ; and Lucy Manette of *A Tale of Two Cities*, on one occasion at least, shows distinct signs of animation.

But the influence of Mary Hogarth upon Dickens' art made itself felt in other directions. We have seen how it inspired his ideal of womanhood, and how it stultified his genius by warping his conception of the Eternal Feminine. Because of that youthful illusion which wove a spell about his heroines as Harlequin with his magic wand weaves a spell about poor Columbine and changes her into a pantomime fairy, all glitter and pose ; because of this perversion of his innate sense of proportion, Dickens remained for the greater part of his life blind to the better part of woman's nature : that better part which makes her a helpmeet fit for man, an equal partner in his joys and sorrows, his lordly lusts and slavish weaknesses, his proud ambitions and his secret sins, a sympathetic companion and good comrade rather than a guardian angel. And the mischief did not end there. Having conceived his perfect woman he must needs conceive a perfect man to match her and mate with her. He seems to have argued that if such radiant creatures as Mary Hogarth were, as he expressed it, "made for Home and fireside

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peace and happiness," it behove him to evolve an appropriate demi-god to share that rarefied atmosphere with her. The heroine must have her hero, fashioned of the same ethereal stuff. And so he cast about him for some high-falutin' male upon whom to found his ideal man.

We do not know why he should have hit upon his brother-in-law, Henry Burnett. We know very little of Mr. Burnett beyond that he married Dickens' sister Fanny, and that he was a dissenter. Yet he was commonly accepted by Dickens' intimates as the original of Nicholas Nickleby; and if of Nicholas Nickleby why not the original also of Harry Maylie, Edward Chester, Tom Pinch, Walter Gay, and the rest of those walking gentlemen who all, in moments of acute crisis, fell into Nicholas Nickleby's offensive habit of indulging in wild heroics of the "Whence-will-come-curses-at-your-command?" brand. Still it is hard to believe that any young man of this type ever existed—even in those stilted times—except as a gorgeous figment of a raw young novelist's imagination. The truth is, I think, that Dickens, in the fever and rush of over-production, only too readily accepted certain stagey conventions of melodrama in lieu of the real stuff of life. He had not yet arrived at that stage of mental development which instinctively mistrusts the grandiose and is very much more inclined to seek for romance by the wayside than in the limelight.

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And yet Dickens was at all times so eager to justify the extravagances and excesses into which his buoyant fancy did so often betray him that even in the depiction of his preposterous heroes he must draw from some living model that he could point to as the prototype of his most improbable character. So, it may be that he copied the features, the manner, the style and the tone of his brother-in-law, and in the ardour of creation lost sight of the real man. Then, the puppet that he had fashioned out of that incongruous material becoming to him more real than the actual figure upon whom it was founded, he had breathed into it some semblance of life, had invested it with strange bombastic qualities lacking in the model, and at last got its machinery to work, if a little awkwardly and jerkily. Inevitably an automaton resulted. But Dickens loved the automaton as children love their dolls. It mattered nothing to him that it was with his own voice the automaton spoke ; that its every movement was imparted to it by his own hands, that nothing changed it, and that nothing came out of it, except sawdust : to him it was real and vital, not so much a speaking likeness of the man upon whom it was modelled as the man himself, a little sublimated, translated from the commonplace atmosphere of everyday into the glamorous twilight of romance.

There is no doubt that Dickens thought to pay

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his brother-in-law a handsome compliment by turning him to such queer uses. He liked Burnett and continued to like him, even after he had shed some illusions about him. He writes to Forster in May 1848 telling him that Mrs. Burnett (his sister Fanny) is dangerously ill. And two months later he writes again :

A change took place in poor Fanny, about the middle of the day yesterday, which took me out there last night. Her cough suddenly ceased almost, and, strange to say, she immediately became aware of her hopeless state ; to which she resigned herself, after an hour's unrest and struggle, with extraordinary sweetness and constancy. . . . I had a long interview with her to-day alone. . . . I asked her whether she had any care or anxiety in the world. She said no, none. It was hard to die at such a time, but . . . Burnett had always been very good to her ; they had never quarrelled ; she was sorry to think of his going back to such a lonely home ; and was distressed about her children, but not painfully so. . . . Her husband being young, she said, and her children infants, she could not help thinking sometimes that it would be very long in the course of nature before they were reunited. . . .

All that we know of Mr. Henry Burnett is contained in that brief reference to him. The curtain rises and falls on that sad vision of the husband

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and the brother drawn together by a common sorrow, revealing themselves to one another for the first time, perhaps. At any rate it is significant that in his next book, *David Copperfield*, Dickens definitely abandons his old banal convention of the stereotyped hero of melodrama. His new hero David—in his childhood, boyhood, youth, and early manhood—has an air of authenticity. We are interested in him, as we have never been interested in any of his predecessors. It is as if Dickens, seeing Burnett for the first time as he really was, sees also that he is a man very like other men, very like Dickens himself. "If *this*—this homely, kindly, simple, companionable man—this man who is so much like me—if *this* is a hero," says Dickens in effect, "then *I* have been a sort of hero all my life without knowing it." And forthwith he proceeded to evolve his next hero out of his own inner consciousness.



JUDGE GAZALEE

"Justice Stareleigh"



CHAPTER THE FOURTH
SOME PICKWICKIANS

CHAPTER

THE FOURTH

I

IT WAS IN 1836 THAT MR. HALL (OF Messrs. Chapman and Hall) approached the young author of *Sketches by Boz* with a project for a humorous serial, to be published in monthly parts. Dickens himself has described what passed at this momentous interview.

The idea propounded to me (he says) was that the monthly something should be a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by Mr. Seymour ; and there was a notion, either on the part of that admirable humorous artist, or of my visitor, that a NIMROD CLUB, the members of which were to go out shooting, fishing, and so forth, and getting themselves into difficulties through their want of dexterity, would be the best means of introducing these. I objected, on consideration, that although born and partly bred in the country, I was no great sportsman, except in regard to all kinds of locomotion ; that the idea was not novel, and had already been much used ; that it would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text ; and that I would like to take my own way, with a freer range of English scenes and people, and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever course I might prescribe to myself at starting. My views being deferred to, I thought of Mr. Pickwick and wrote the first number, from

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the proof-sheets of which Mr. Seymour made his drawing of the club and his happy portrait of its founder. I connected Mr. Pickwick with a club because of the original suggestion, and I put in Mr. Winkle expressly for the use of Mr. Seymour.

Dickens wrote thus, thirteen years later, in reply to some foolish statements made by members of Mr. Seymour's family in which they claimed that it was the artist and not the author who had been responsible for the creation of the Pickwick Club. Mr. Hall was dead when this controversy arose; but Mr. Chapman "clearly recollected his partner's account of the interview, and confirmed every part of it . . . with one exception. In giving Mr. Seymour credit for the figure by which all the habitable globe knows Mr. Pickwick, and which certainly at the outset helped to make him a reality, it had given the artist too much. The reader will hardly be so startled as I was (says Forster in his *Life*) on coming to the closing line of Mr. Chapman's confirmatory letter. 'As this letter is to be historical, I may as well claim what little belongs to me in the matter, and that is the figure of Pickwick. Seymour's first sketch was of a long thin man. The present immortal one he made from my description of a friend of mine at Richmond—a fat old beau who would wear, in spite of the ladies' protests, drab tights and black gaiters. His name was John Foster.'"

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The name, Pickwick, Dickens took from that of a celebrated coach-proprietor, Moses Pickwick, of Bath. This Mr. Pickwick was also the landlord of the White Hart Hotel in Bath, which stood "opposite the great Pump Room, where the waiters, from their costume, might be mistaken for Westminster boys, only they destroy the illusion by behaving themselves so much better."¹ "The White Hart flourished in Stall Street, and until 1864 (when the house was given up) the waiters wore knee-breeches and silk stockings, and the women-servants donned neat muslin caps. The old coaching inn no longer exists, and its site is indicated by the Grand Pump Room Hotel, the original carved sign of a white hart being preserved and still used over the door of an inn of the same name in Widcombe, a suburb of Bath."

Thus we see that in *Pickwick Papers* Dickens did not scruple to avail himself of the assistance that any handy ready-made material might afford him. The truth was, of course, that he began by regarding this comic serial as a mere job—just as his *Life of Grimaldi* was a job; that he entered upon his part of the enterprise lightheartedly, with no serious artistic purpose, his sole aim being to amuse the many-headed and thus justify his publishers' faith in him. He borrowed names, he borrowed personalities, he borrowed backgrounds, he accepted certain suggestions: and this was all

¹ *The Dickens Country*, by F. G. Kitton.

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quite legitimate. But it has lately been said, rather spitefully, that he also borrowed—and this, if true, would be hardly as defensible—from at least one of his contemporaries. Let us examine into the truth of this charge.

II

In May, 1822, Edmund Kean appeared at the Drury Lane Theatre as Cardinal Wolsey in *Henry VIII*. In those spacious days an entire programme did not consist merely of three short acts, beginning at nine o'clock and lasting, with intervals, until eleven o'clock, as it does now sometimes. Theatrical managers offered far more generous fare to their patrons in the early nineteenth century. Tragedy, melodrama, comedy, and farce were often represented in the course of one evening's entertainment. And so it was at Drury Lane in May, 1822.

Henry VIII. was followed by *The Boarding House*, an uproarious farce of the broadest and most rollicking kind, of which, however, nothing is remembered save one character. This character, bearing the name of Simon Spatterdash, was originally played by a forgotten actor, Knight. Knight does not seem to have scored any very notable success in the part; but, some years later, the farce was revived at the Surrey Theatre, and the character of Simon Spatterdash was then made hugely popular by another comedian named Sam Vale. It is claimed that this Sam Vale was the original of Sam

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Weller, and that the name "Weller" was suggested by Vale; but this at least is unlikely since we know that the Dickens family once employed a nurse named Mary Weller. It has also been claimed that he invented what we know now as Wellerisms. And he certainly did give off a good number of those quaint sayings. Here are a few of his best; and it must be admitted that they are, some of them, quite as good as Dickens' own.

I know the world, as the monkey said when he cut off his tail.

I am down upon you, as the extinguisher said to the rushlight.

Let everyone take care of himself, as the jackass said when he danced among the chickens.

Come on, as the man said to the tight boot.

I am turned soger, as the lobster said when he popped his head out of the boiler.

I am all of a perspiration, as the mutton-chop said to the gridiron.

But to whomsoever the credit of inventing Wellerisms is due it is certainly not due to Sam Vale, nor to the author of *The Boarding House*. Walter Scott had discovered the peculiar virtue of a Wellerism as long before as 1818. In *Rob Roy*, written in that year, Andrew Fair service says: "Ower mony maisters—as the paddock said to the harrow when every tooth gae her a tig." And in *Kenilworth*, published three years later, Michael Lambourne says: "The hope of bettering myself, to

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be sure, as the old woman said when she leaped over the bridge at Kingston."

Moreover there was a certain periodical entitled *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, Instruction, &c.*, published weekly at twopence, in which appeared, on May 21, 1823, most of the Wellerisms uttered and popularised by Sam Vale, and several more besides.

And finally, to emphasise the dubiety of this vexed question, we find Longfellow, in *The Spanish Student*, published in 1840, just after *Pickwick Papers* had finished its course, putting similar sayings into the mouth of the man-servant, Chispa. Says Chispa :

Peace be with you, as the ass said to the cabbages.

And a good beginning of the week it is, as he said who was hanged on Monday morning.

And so we plough along, as the fly said to the ox.

From these instances, then, it will be seen that this kind of jesting was the commonest form of current wit during the first part of the nineteenth century. For there are fashions in humour as in most other things. Just now the mode is to affect the Yankee idiom and a Yankee accent, because it is so much easier to be funny in American. Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago, we all talked epigram and paradox. A little earlier there was a plague of puns. And before then practical joking was rife. So we might go back, skipping the Dickens period, to the coarse heavy buffoonery that pre-



SAM VALE

"Sam Weller"

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ceded his gaiety of highspirits, to the stilted wit of the Addison period, to the lewdness of the Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar school, to the foul greasy japes of Dekker and his filthy tribe, and at last to the sturdy hearty bawdiness of the Elizabethans.

It had happened that Wellerisms were in vogue at the time when Dickens began to write; and so of course he had to try his hand at them, like any other smart young man. For it is to be borne in mind that Dickens was, in all salient aspects of his character at least, essentially a man who belonged to his own period. He reflected the idea and opinions, the tastes and the foibles, the prejudices and the prepossessions of the moment to a most remarkable degree. He did this consistently, in his work, passing from phase to phase of social development as his art grew and matured, and so presenting us with a series of reviews of the manners and customs, not only in dress and habits but in thought and feeling, of the half-century during which he lived and of which he wrote.

The delicate art of *Great Expectations* (which may be accounted his last worthy book) is in as direct contrast to the happy-go-lucky methods of the *Pickwick Papers* as the railway train of the Seventies was to the old postchaise. The only real distinction between Dickens and his contemporaries consists in that instinctive faculty of selection which does always stamp even his most haphaz-

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ard and seemingly casual work with the hall-mark of genius.

I think it is often too lightly assumed that Dickens was very ill-acquainted with the work of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries in the higher walks of literature; though, beyond question, there was never anything of the mere bookman about him at any time. And probably, in his early days, he knew surprisingly little of the great poets and philosophers who had attained their apogee when he was only just emerging from his swaddling-clothes. And yet, despite this limitation, he had as I say an instinctive faculty of selection that saved him from the very pitfalls into which the mere academic critic would say that he was bound to fall. This faculty saved him from the thin flavourless mode of the pun. It saved him from the brutal rough-and-tumble of the practical joke. It saved him from the fustian and bombast of the mid-Victorian school of fiction, as exemplified in Bulwer Lytton. It saved him from coarseness and grossness and crudeness in the midst of grotesquerie and eccentricity. It did not save him in his youth from the influence of the prevalent Wellerism; and for this good reason: that he did not need to be saved from a form of humour so rich in possibilities to one of his quick fancy and inimitable drollery. He lifted the Wellerism out of the gutter as Shakespeare lifted the *Chronicles* of Holinshed out of the dust—to breathe into them the breath of life. He

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did what every triumphant genius has done—and been carped at for doing; he took an ugly shapeless lump of clay and fashioned it into form and comeliness. I have seen it gravely stated that Dickens owed his first great inspiration to Sam Vale, the comic actor of the Surrey Theatre. It would be as true to say that Sam Vale invented the Cockney. Whereas we know that the Cockney invented himself. And so likewise did Dickens.

III

But apart from these very doubtful prototypes of Mr. Pickwick himself and Sam Weller—and one other exception—it is fairly well established that *Pickwick Papers* does contain several authentic portraits, whimsically, and in one case cruelly, caricatured.

To speak of old Tony Weller, the other exception, first.

Mrs. Lynn Linton declared, in that tone of settled conviction for which she was ever remarkable, as well in small things as in great, that “Old Weller was a real person and we knew him. He was ‘Old Chumley’ in the flesh and drove the stage daily from London to Rochester and back again . . . a good-natured, red-faced old fellow.”

But it is also claimed that the real original of Tony Weller was one Cole, driver of the “Shannon” coach between London and Ipswich. A few quaint sayings are attributed to Cole. On one occa-

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sion he was asked about an old companion of his named Stedman, and replied : " Stedman ? Law bless you, sir ; he's been dead this many a year. Leastways, if he ain't, they've used him werry bad, for they've buried him ! " Which is quite in the Tony Weller vein.

But then the fashion of speech, the slow dry wit, the manner, and the outward appearance of the old stage-coach-driver would very fitly have applied to some of the old London bus-drivers of not so many years ago. He was a " stout, red-faced, elderly man . . . smoking with great vehemence, but between every half-dozen puffs he took his pipe from his mouth, and looked first at Mr. Weller and then at Mr. Pickwick. Then, he would bury in a quart pot as much of his countenance as the dimensions of the quart pot admitted of its receiving, and take another look at Sam and Mr. Pickwick. Then he would take another half-dozen puffs with an air of profound meditation and look at them again. At last the stout man, putting up his legs on the seat, began to puff at his pipe without leaving off at all, and to stare through the smoke at the new-comers as if he had made up his mind to see the most he could of them." His swaddlings in layer on layer of shawls and wraps and rugs, his hoarse voice, " like some strange effort of ventriloquism," and his habit of philosophising at great length on things in general: all these are peculiarities that old Tony Weller shared with several bus-drivers of my ac-

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quaintance, beside whom I have sat upon the box-seat, and to whose discourse I have listened as to the words of an oracle, on many long cold journeys in the Eighties. I think that Tony Weller was just a good sample of Dickens' skill, already referred to, in summing up all the variations from one well-known national type in one colossal archetype; and that is all.

But elsewhere in *Pickwick* there can be little doubt that Dickens drew from the actual living model.

Serjeant Buzfuz, for instance, really existed in the person of Serjeant Bompas, whose son is the eminent K.C. still living. Skimpin may very likely have been Wilkins; and Snubbin, Arabin, both of them well-known counsel in their day. Of Snubbin, who may pose as a specimen barrister of that time, and of whom we are given a full-length portrait, we are told that he

was a lantern-faced, sallow-complexioned man, of about five-and-forty, or—as the novels say—he might have been fifty. He had that dull-looking boiled eye which is often to be seen in the heads of people who have applied themselves during many years to a weary and laborious course of study; and which would have been sufficient, without the additional eyeglass which dangled from a broad black ribbon round his neck, to warn a stranger that he was very near-sighted. His hair

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was thin and weak, which was partly attributable to his never having devoted much time to its arrangement, and partly to his having worn for five-and-twenty years the forensic wig which hung on a block beside him. The marks of hair-powder on his coat-collar, and the ill-washed and worse tied white neckerchief round his throat, showed that he had not found leisure since he left the court to make any alteration in his dress: while the slovenly style of the remainder of his costume warranted the inference that his personal appearance would not have been very much improved if he had. Books of practice, heaps of papers, and opened letters, were scattered over the table, without any attempt at order or arrangement; the furniture of the room was old and rickety; the doors of the bookcase were rotting in their hinges; the dust flew out of the carpet in little clouds at every step; the blinds were yellow with age and dirt; the state of everything in the room showed, with a clearness not to be mistaken, that Mr. Serjeant Snubbin was far too much occupied with his professional pursuits to take any great heed or regard of his personal comforts.

There are slovenly barristers nowadays; but none in general practice quite so careless of their person and surroundings, I should say. But that their methods have not greatly changed, in spite of the changes in their appearance, Mr. Fitz-

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gerald points out in the following passage in his book, *Bozland* :

Not long since, in a breach of promise case in Mr. Justice Lawrence's Court, the late Serjeant Buzfuz reappeared in the flesh, and began his speech by declaring that "not merely in 'the whole course of his professional experience, but never at any time, had facts more painful been brought before a jury. The plaintiff, gentleman, the plaintiff was a young lady, the daughter of a gentleman deceased, who was at one time in the War Office. She lived with her mother and her two sisters, Kate and Jessie, in the peaceful and innocent atmosphere of a small preparatory school at Thornton Heath. Gentlemen," Mr.—— went on, in tender accents, "she was a young girl; she knew nothing of London life; she had been delicately and tenderly nurtured by a loving mother, and had lived a quiet country life at home, beloved of her two younger sisters. Virtuous, poor—but, gentlemen, though poor, happy—knowing nothing and suspecting nothing of evil and deceit. Gentlemen, she got in the train for London Bridge, not knowing that in the same carriage was a person whom, for brevity, *I will call a man!* . . ."

Mr. Justice Stareleigh was in real life Mr. Justice Gazalee, of whom we have this portrait, which is said to resemble the original closely : "a most

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particularly short man, and so fat that he seemed all face and waistcoat. He rolled in, upon two little turned legs, and having bobbed gravely to the bar, who bobbed gravely to him, put his little legs underneath his table, and his little three-cornered hat upon it; and when Mr. Justice Stareleigh had done this, all you could see of him was two queer little eyes, one broad pink face, and somewhere about half of a big and very comical-looking wig.

One other lawyer in *Pickwick Papers*, Mr. Perker, is said to have been founded on Mr. Ellis, of Blackmore and Ellis, solicitors, for whom Dickens worked in his youth as a clerk.

Of the other characters there remains Mr. Dowler, "a stern-eyed man of about five-and-forty, who had a bald and glossy forehead, with a good deal of black hair at the sides and back of his head, and large black whiskers," who had "a fierce and peremptory air, which was very dignified," and who "hummed a tune in a manner which seemed to say that he rather suspected someone wanted to take advantage of him, but it wouldn't do." This is said to be an excellent description of Dickens' biographer, John Forster; but, for certain reasons to be mentioned later on, this seems doubtful. Then there are Doctor Slammer who bore a colourable resemblance to Dickens' uncle Dr. Lamert; Mrs. Leo Hunter, a recognizable caricature of the



THE HONOURABLE MISS MONCKTON

"Mrs Leo Hunter"

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Honorable Miss Monckton (afterwards Lady Cook); the Fat Boy who, in real life, was "James Budden, and whose father kept the Red Lion Inn at the corner of High Street and Military Road, Chatham, where the lad's remarkable obesity attracted general attention;" and, lastly, Mr. Pott.

Mr. Pott, editor of the *Eatanswill Gazette*, was unmistakably founded on Lord Brougham. His original description in a draft number of *Pickwick Papers* might have been a description of the statesman himself. This was afterwards toned down a little; but even so the likeness was instantly recognisable to Dickens' contemporaries. "... a tall, thin man, with a sandy-coloured head inclined to baldness, and a face in which solemn importance was blended with a look of unfathomable profundity. He was dressed in a long brown surtout, with a black cloth waistcoat, and drab trousers. A double eyeglass dangled at his waistcoat; and on his head he wore a very low-crowned hat with a broad brim." And the personality of Mr. Pott bore, in some of its most salient peculiarities, a grotesque resemblance to that of the great Whig chancellor.

No stronger and stranger a figure than his (says Mr. Justin McCarthy in *A History of Our Own Times*) is described in the modern history of England. . . . He might have been described as one possessed by a very demon of work. His physical strength never gave way.

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His high spirits never deserted him. His self-confidence was boundless. He thought he knew everything and could do everything better than any other man. He delighted in giving evidence that he understood the business of the specialist better than the specialist himself. His vanity was overweening, and made him ridiculous almost as often and as much as his genius made him admired. The comic literature of more than a generation had no subject more fruitful than the vanity and restlessness of Lord Brougham. . . . He was not an orator of the highest class . . . his style was too diffuse and sometimes too uncouth . . . his action was wild, and sometimes even furious ; his gestures were singularly ungraceful ; his manners were grotesque. . . . Brougham's was an excitable and self-assertive nature . . . his personal vanity was immense . . . his eccentricities and his almost savage temper made him intolerable. . . ."

This from an admirer !

Dickens, in his reporting days, must often have watched and listened to Lord Brougham ; and somehow he seems to have conceived a violent antipathy toward him. But in that cruel caricature of the statesman in the absurd person of Pott we have the only instance of his ever gratifying a personal dislike by putting his victim in the pillory.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH
ABOUT SQUEERS & MR. FANG

CHAPTER THE FIFTH ABOUT SQUEERS AND MR. FANG

DICKENS NEVER AGAIN GRATIFIED a personal dislike by pillorying the object of his aversion; but he did great social service in pillorying the figureheads of systems and the upholders and exponents of laws of which he disapproved. I think he rejoiced in his power to do this; and in the consciousness of his power and in the exuberance of his rejoicing it may be that he was at times a little indiscriminate, a little too emphatic, a little unjust.

But . . . try to realise the position that this young man of twenty-four held in 1836. Try to realise how his lightest word was quoted and acclaimed as wisdom by not only the scanty reading public of that illiterate time, but also by those who could not read, and so had to have his writings read to them. As Forster says of the reception of *Pickwick Papers*.

Of what the reception of the book had been up to this time, and of the popularity Dickens had won as its author, this also will be the proper place to speak. For its kind, its extent, and the absence of everything unreal or factitious in the causes that contributed to it, it is unexampled in literature. Here was a series of sketches, without the pretence to such interest as attends a well-constructed

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story ; put forth in a form apparently ephemeral as its purpose ; having none that seemed higher than to exhibit some studies of cockney manners with help from a comic artist ; and after four or five parts had appeared, without newspaper notice or puffing, and itself not subserving in the public anything false or unworthy, it sprang into a popularity that each part carried higher and higher, until people at this time talked of nothing else, tradesmen recommended their goods by using its name, and its sale, outstripping at a bound that of all the most famous books of the century, had reached to an almost fabulous number. Of part one, the binder prepared four hundred ; and of part fifteen, his order was for more than forty thousand. Every class, the high equally with the low, were attracted to it. The charm of its gaiety and good humour, its inexhaustible fun, its riotous overflow of animal spirits, its brightness and keenness of observation, and above all, the incomparable ease of its many varieties of enjoyment, fascinated everybody. Judges on the bench and boys in the street, gravity and folly, the young and the old, those who were entering life and those who were quitting it, alike found it to be irresistible. " An archdeacon," wrote Mr. Carlyle . . . " with his own venerable lips, repeated to me the other night, a strange profane story : of a solemn clergyman who had been administering ghostly consolation to a sick person ; having finished, satisfactorily

ABOUT SQUEERS & MR. FANG

as he thought, and got out of the room, he heard the sick person ejaculate: 'Well, thank God, *Pickwick* will be out in ten days anyway !' "

Try to realise how this consciousness of power over the minds and hearts of the British public must have intoxicated the mere youth that Dickens was then, and wonder rather that he preserved so much of his level-headedness in the whirlwind of applause that surged about him, than that, occasionally, he was betrayed into any slight abuse of his power.

One likes—it is human !—to bring these great ones down to earth. One likes to feel one's kinship with them, even in unworthy things. But one does not like, and one finds no difficulty in utterly disbelieving, the story that because, when Dickens and Mr. Hablot Browne went down to the neighbourhood of Barnard Castle to interview the notorious Yorkshire schoolmaster, William Shaw, they were received "with extreme hauteur," Dickens took his revenge for that slight by lampooning him as Squeers. The whole story is rendered the more improbable by the assertion that "Phiz" (Halbot Browne) drew an instantly recognisable portrait of Shaw on his thumbnail.

Shaw lacked an eye. A man of the same name and address had been twice tried, sixteen years before the publication of *Nickleby*, for atrocities similar to those described in the account of Dothe-

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boys Hall. But, according to Shaw's old pupils, he was quite a nice man, really.

And yet . . . Dickens.

* . . . had gone down provided with some fictitious letters of introduction, which his friend Nitton had prepared—"a pious fraud" he calls it. He was supposed to be looking for a suitable school wherein to place a widow's child. . . . Four miles away was Barnard Castle, which was to be his real hunting-ground. "All the schools are round about that place." . . . The visitors were only however to devote a day or two days, Thursday and Friday, to the investigation. They took a post-chaise—Nicholas and Squeers drove over in a pony-cart . . . and arrived at a long, cold-looking house one storey high, with a few straggling outbuildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining . . . he (Dickens) had no time to waste . . . had to commence and introduce Squeers and his school scenes almost at once.

. . . as to the original of Squeers. It was insisted that as the house was sketched from something existing, so also must have been the school-master himself. The result was unfortunate, but Dickens was not in the least responsible. Squeers is wholly imaginary in appearance, manner, and diction, and for the purposes of fiction it was necessary that he should be so. It was enough

* *Bozland*, by Percy Fitzgerald.



SERJEANT BOMPAS

"Serjeant Bompas"



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for the author that the notorious system existed of which Squeers was a type. A wretched pedagogue, exercising his sordid cruelties, however accurately drawn from life, would be no gain to a fiction. The author indeed declares positively in his original preface that Squeers is the representative of a class and not of an individual. The subject had long been in his thoughts. Even when a child at Rochester he had been vividly impressed by a lad who had come from a Yorkshire school "with a suppurated abscess" which his master had "ripped open with an inky pen-knife." . . .

Dickens, however, was not the first to attract the attention of the kingdom to these horrors. Some sixteen years before the appearance of *Nickleby* they had all been revealed in the course of some actions which were tried in London in October, 1823, before Judge Park—Jones *versus* Shaw, and Ockerby against the same. These were the parents of the ill-used boy, and during the course of the trial many of the Squeers incidents were brought out. There can be no doubt that though Dickens did not sketch Squeers from Shaw, he certainly made use of many of the incidents which Shaw's case supplied. There was once sold by auction in London one of Shaw's cards, dating from near Greta Bridge, offering to teach young gentlemen Latin, English, arith-

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metic, geography, and geometry, and to board and lodge them for £20 a year, which, it will be recollected, were Mr. Squeers' terms. A manuscript note states that Mr. Shaw "leaves the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill, at half-past seven o'clock, Thursday morning, July 25." Numbers of the boys, it seems, had lost their sight through a horrible neglect. One of the Jones boys told his story, and it certainly seemed like poor "Graymarsh" or one of his fellows, telling of his treatment by Squeers.

"There were nearly three hundred boys in the schools. We had meat three times a week, and on the other days potatoes and bread and cheese. When any gentleman came to see his children, Mr. Shaw used to order the boys who were without trousers or jackets to get under the desks; we were sometimes without our trousers for four or five days while they were being mended. The boys washed in a long trough similar to what the horses drink from; the boys had but two towels, and the big boys used to take advantage of the little boys, and get to the towels first; we had no supper; we had warm water and milk for tea and dry bread; we had hay and straw beds, and one sheet to each bed, in which four or five boys slept; there were about thirty beds in one room, and a large tub in the middle; there were only three or four boys in some of the beds; we had fleas every other morning (a laugh); I mean, we had quills

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furnished us to flea the beds every other morning, and we caught a good beating if we did not fill the quills with fleas; we had the skimmings of the pot every Sunday afternoon; the usher offered a penny for every maggot, and the boys found more than a quart full, but he did not give them the money (a laugh); we had soap every Saturday afternoon, but that was always used by the big boys, and we had no soap but what we bought; on one occasion (in October) I felt a weakness in my eyes, and could not write my copy; the defendant said he would beat me; on the next day I could not see at all, and I told Mr. Shaw, who sent me, with three others, to the wash-house; he always sent those boys who were ill to the wash-house, as he had no doctor; those who were totally blind were sent into a room; there were nine boys in this room totally blind; a Mr. Benning, a doctor, was sent for; while I remained in the wash-house no doctor attended us; I was in the room two months, and the doctor then discharged me, saying I had lost one eye; in fact, I was blind with both; I went to the wash-house a second time, but no doctor attended me then."

. . . Mr. Squeers, too, was in the habit of confiscating the boys' clothes, dressing them in old ragged garments that were too tight or too large, as the case might be. . . .

The strangest part, however, was the defence, which was that Shaw was rather a humane and

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amiable man—"in private life" at least—and that it was the system of his school that was responsible, "avowedly founded on the most parsimonious principles, with a view to suit certain parties." He kept five ushers, and the doctor's charge for one year, it was sworn, was £100. Mrs. Shaw was reported to be "tender-hearted." . . .

The upshot of that trial was that Shaw was mulcted in heavy damages; but continued his school. Then, when *Nickleby* appeared, Dickens' description of Dotheboys Hall revived all the old odium that had attached to the Yorkshire schoolmaster. It was insisted that the sketch of Squeers was intended for Shaw. "He became an object of ridicule to his thoughtless, or perhaps spiteful, neighbours, which, together with the ruin that soon after overtook him through loss of pupils, broke his spirit and hastened his death."

Certainly it was a good thing that Shaw should die, and with him his infamous kind of school. But one is somehow intrigued to consider whether Dickens was actuated by a pure zeal for reform, or by the exigencies of his story, to journey so far afield and find material for those chapters on Mr. Squeers' establishment which gave weight to *Nickleby* and attracted to it that kind of attention which the methods of Mr. Hall Caine and Miss Marie Corelli attract to their novels. I think that there is something valid in my suspicion that

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Dickens, in his earliest period, vamped so heavily on the strain of public abuses in order to lampoon individuals for whom he had conceived a dislike. But, at any rate, he abandoned this unworthy habit in *Nicholas Nickleby*; and thenceforward devoted himself not to the derision, denunciation, and destruction of individuals by means of gross caricature, but to the abolition of social evils such as his inimitable combination of talents in indignation and ridicule enabled his mind to compass.

But there is at least one wholly authentic portrait, as to the identity of which there can be no possible question, in one of Dickens' books. This is the portrait of Mr. Fang in *Oliver Twist*. Mr. Fang was drawn with meticulous care from a living original. Dickens himself was always delighted to admit this.

Wanting (says Forster) an insolent and harsh police-magistrate, he bethought him of an original ready to his hand in one of the London offices; and instead of pursuing his later method of giving a personal appearance that should in some sort render difficult the identification of mental peculiarities, he was only eager to get in the whole man complete upon his page, figure, and face as well as manners and mind. He wrote accordingly . . . to Mr. Haines, a gentleman who then had

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general supervision over the police-courts for the daily newspapers. "In my next number of *Oliver Twist* I must have a magistrate; and casting about for a magistrate whose harshness and insolence would render him a fit subject to be *shown up*, I have as a necessary consequence stumbled upon Mr. Laing of Hatton Garden celebrity. I know the man's character perfectly well; but as it would be necessary to describe his personal appearance also, I ought to have seen him, which (fortunately or unfortunately as the case may be) I have never done. In this dilemma it occurred to me that perhaps I might under your auspices be smuggled into the Hatton Garden office for a few moments some morning. If you can further my object I shall be really very greatly obliged to you." The opportunity was found; the magistrate was brought up before the novelist. . . .

And Dickens got him down on paper, thus :

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great quantity of hair, and what he had growing on the back and sides of his head. His face was stern, and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought an action against his countenance for libel and recovered heavy damages.

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The old gentleman (Mr. Brownlow) bowed respectfully ; and advancing to the magistrate's desk, said, suiting the action to the word: " That is my name and address, sir." He then withdrew a pace or two ; and, with another polite and gentlemanly inclination of the head, waited to be questioned.

Now it so happened that Mr. Fang was at that moment perusing a leading article in a newspaper of the morning, adverting to some recent decision of his, and commending him for the three hundred and fiftieth time to the special and particular notice of the Secretary of State for the Home Department. He was out of temper ; and he looked up with an angry scowl.

" Who are you ? " said Mr. Fang.

The old gentleman pointed, with some surprise, to his card.

" Officer ! " said Mr. Fang, tossing the card contemptuously away with the newspaper. " Who is this fellow ? "

" My name, sir, " said the old gentleman, speaking *like* a gentleman, " my name, sir, is Brownlow. Permit me to inquire the name of the magistrate who offers a gratuitous and unprovoked insult to a respectable person, under the protection of the bench. "

Saying this, Mr. Brownlow looked round the office as if in search of some person who would afford him the required information.

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"Officer!" said Mr. Fang, throwing the paper on one side, "what's this fellow charged with?"

"He's not charged at all, your worship," replied the officer. "He appears against the boy, your worship."

His worship knew this perfectly well; but it was a good annoyance, and a safe one.

"Appears against the boy, does he?" said Fang, surveying Mr. Brownlow contemptuously from head to foot. "Swear him!"

"Before I am sworn I must beg to say one word," said Mr. Brownlow; "and that is, that I never, without actual experience, could have believed——"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said Mr. Fang, peremptorily.

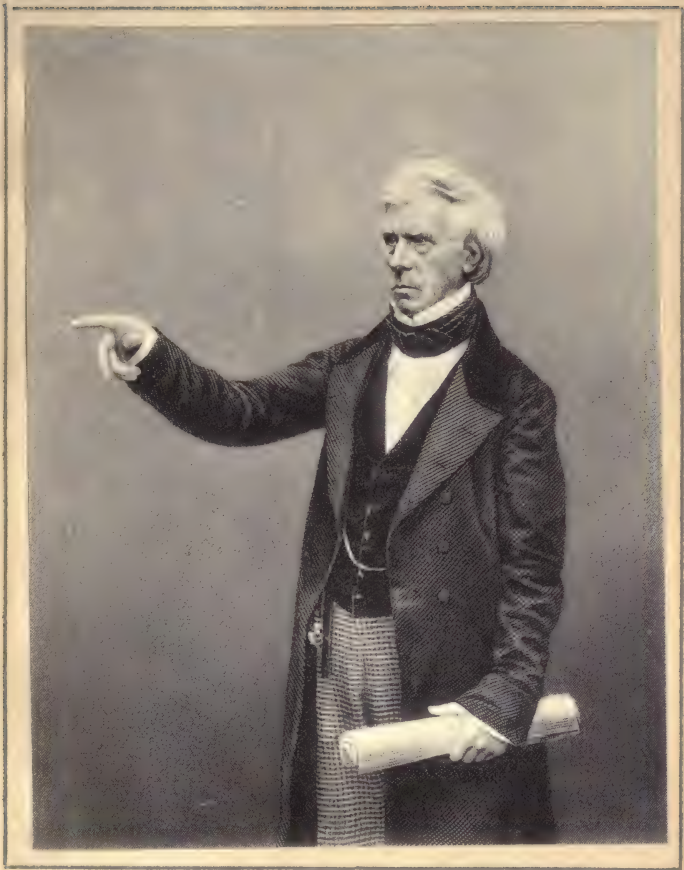
"I will not, sir," replied the old gentleman.

"Hold your tongue this instant, or I'll have you turned out of the office!" said Mr. Fang. "You are an insolent, impertinent fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate!"

"What!" exclaimed the old gentleman, red-denying.

"Swear this person!" said Fang to the clerk. "I'll not hear another word. Swear him."

Mr. Brownlow's indignation was greatly roused; but reflecting perhaps that he might only injure the boy by giving vent to it, he suppressed his feelings and submitted to be sworn at once.



LORD BROUGHAM

"Mr Potts"

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"Now," said Fang, "what's the charge against this boy? What have you got to say, sir?"

"I was standing at a bookstall—" Mr. Brownlow began.

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Mr. Fang. "Policeman! Where's the policeman? Here, swear this policeman. Now, policeman, what is this?"

The policeman, with becoming humility, related how he had taken the charge; how he had searched Oliver and found nothing on his person; and how that was all he knew about it.

"Are there any witnesses?" inquired Mr. Fang.

"None, your worship," replied the policeman.

Mr. Fang sat silent for some minutes, and then, turning round to the prosecutor, said in a towering passion :

"Do you mean to state what your complaint against this boy is, man, or do you not? You have been sworn. Now if you stand there, refusing to give evidence, I'll punish you for disrespect to the bench, I will, by——"

As a direct result of that scathing indictment Mr. Laing was removed from the bench by the Home Secretary, very shortly afterward, on the occasion of some fresh outbreak of foul ill-temper and intolerable brutality.

And whilst we are on this theme it may profit

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us, perhaps, to consider how it came about that Dickens did always show this fierce hostility to all sorts and conditions of lawyers. In all his amazing gallery of legal figures there is hardly one, from Messrs. Dodson and Fogg to the stately Mr. Tulkinghorn, who is not in some way a repellent figure. I think the explanation of this antagonism is to be found in the circumstance that Dickens had once been a solicitor's clerk. As a solicitor's clerk it was his misfortune to become too early acquainted with the sadder, shadier side of human nature ; and so he had conceived one of his peculiar aversions to all that reminded him of that period of his career : an aversion which included all the people for whose interests and advantages the lawyer stands.

As I have said elsewhere: if there had ever been any tendency in Dickens' nature to associate gentleness with the class that consists of "gentlemen" and "ladies," his experiences in Mr. Mollo's and Mr. Blackmore's offices must assuredly have dispossessed him of it. One can hardly appreciate at its true value the goodness of the Have-Nots until one has traded in the badness of the Haves. It may be urged that a lawyer's experience is confined solely to the worst and not necessarily most typical cases. That notion falls to the ground, however, when one remembers that the whole fabric of the law is built upon the principle of mutual mistrust. Every clause, every

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article, every stipulation and condition ; every enactment, rule, and precedent is drafted and re-drafted and re-drafted again, and rough-copied and fair-copied and fair-copied again, is settled and re-settled and copied and re-copied, and settled and yet again re-settled, and bandied from hand to hand and argued and 'squabbled and fought over, and finally engrossed and signed and sealed and delivered—in every stage of its progress on the frank assumption that either of the parties concerned is entirely bent on cheating and robbing all or any of the others if it is barely possible for him to do so. The whole practice of the law is an exercise in cunning and chicanery. Truth and honour, good faith and charitableness, mercy and kindness : these are the instincts against which it wages unremitting war. To be generous is to be madly foolish. To be fair-minded is to be quixotic. To forego the seizing of any advantage offered by another's innocence or ignorance or oversight is to write yourself down an ass. To voice scruples against suppressing ugly facts and distorting equivocal circumstances is to forfeit the respect of your legal advisers. To confound law with equity is to amuse them.

Dickens' experience of the law was the one thing needed to add to the effect upon his temperament of his other varied experiences, just that salutary touch of hard sophistication which conduces to perfect clearness of vision. He knew

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the law and lawyers far too well to have any respect for anything or anyone connected with its practice.

So, throughout his whole life, he kept handy a whip with which to thrash the myrmidons of the law whensoever they seemed to him to deserve chastisement.

In August 1855 he wrote :

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that if a magistrate wilfully deliver himself of a slanderous aspersion, knowing it to be unjust, he is unfit for his post.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that if a magistrate, in a fit of bile brought on by recent disregard of some very absurd evidence of his, so yield to his ill-temper as to deliver himself, in a sort of mad exasperation, of such slanderous aspersion as aforesaid, he is unfit for his post.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose it to be very questionable whether, even in degraded Naples at this time, a magistrate could from the official bench insult and traduce the whole people, without being made to suffer for it.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that it would be becoming in some one individual out of between six and seven hundred national representatives, to be so far jealous of the honour of his country, as indignantly to protest against its being thus grossly stigmatised.

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It is altogether a mistake to suppose that the Home Office has any association whatever with the general credit, the general self-respect, the general feeling in behalf of decent utterance, or the general resentment when the same is most discreditably violated. The Home Office is merely an ornamental institution supported out of the general pocket.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that Mr. Hall (Chief Police Magistrate, sitting at Bow Street at that time) is anybody's business, or that we, the mere bone and sinew, tag rag and bobtail of England, have anything to do with him, but to pay him his salary, accept his justice, and meekly bow our heads to his high and mighty reproof.

And again in March 1856 he wrote :

I wonder why I feel a glow of complacency in a court of justice, when I hear the learned judges taking uncommon pains to prevent the prisoner from letting out the truth. If the object of the trial be to discover the truth, perhaps it might be as edifying to hear it, even from the prisoner, as to hear what is unquestionably not the truth from the prisoner's advocate. I wonder why I say, in a flushed and rapturous manner, that it would be "un-English" to examine the prisoner. I suppose that with common fairness it would be next to impossible to confuse him, unless he lied ; and

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if he did lie, I suppose he could hardly be brought to confusion too soon. Why does that word "un-English" always act as a spell upon me, and why do I suffer it to settle any question? Twelve months ago it was un-English to abstain from throttling our soldiers. Thirty years ago it was un-English not to hang people up by scores every Monday. Sixty years ago it was un-English to be sober after dinner. A hundred years ago it was un-English not to love cock-fighting, prize-fighting, dog-fighting, bull-baiting, and other savageries. Why do I submit to the word as a clincher, without asking myself whether it has any meaning? I don't dispute that I do so, every day of my life; but I want to know why I do so?

On the other hand, why am I meek in regard of really non-English sentiments, if the potent bugbear of that term be not called into play? Here is a magistrate tells me I am one of a nation of drunkards. All Englishmen are drunkards, is the judicial bray (of Mr. Hall). Here is another magistrate propounding from the seat of justice the stupendous nonsense that it is desirable that every person who gives alms in the streets should be fined for that offence. This to a Christian people, and with the New Testament lying before him—as a sort of Dummy, I suppose, to swear witnesses on. Why does my so-easily-frightened nationality not take offence at such things? My hobby shies at shadows; why does it amble so

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quietly past these advertising-vans of Block-heads seeking notoriety ?

Why, indeed ? And why have we no modern Dickens to deal thus faithfully with the Shallows of our own time ?

CHAPTER THE SIXTH
THE BROTHERS CHEERYBLE
& OTHERS

CHAPTER THE SIXTH BROTHERS CHEERYBLE & OTHERS

IN SOME RESPECTS *OLIVER TWIST* is the most remarkable of Dickens' books. The same might be said, perhaps, of all Dickens' books, since each is remarkable in some way which distinguishes it from every other. But of *Oliver Twist* it can be said with peculiar force, because in no other book did Dickens depart altogether from his usual style, and deal with his characters and his theme so entirely from the objective point of view, as distinct from the subjective; and in no other book did he write of things and people that he had so little first-hand knowledge of.

In *Oliver Twist* he went for his facts behind the figures of a Royal Commission appointed in 1832 to inquire into the operation of the Poor Laws, and the evils that had grown out of the mal-administration of the old Act of 1796, in spite of the two subsequent Vestry Acts of 1817, which had been passed on the report of an earlier Commission in order to check them. This report was issued in 1834. As a piece of officialdom it was admirable. As an unconscious revelation of the spirit of the times it was piquant. But as an expression of the attitude of those in authority toward the poor it was one of the most damning human documents ever written. Its cynicism, its

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effrontery, its callousness, its brutality, are almost beyond belief in these so much more humanitarian days. Only a stupid and heartless rage for economy in the outlay of money at any cost of suffering seems to have guided the Commissioners to their ultimate conclusions and recommendations.

Dickens, during the days of his Parliamentary reporting, had had some pretty extensive experience of Royal Commissions. He realised that they were thenadays of as little avail in the amelioration of social injustices as they are now. His wrath was aroused, his sympathies kindled. He was aflame to right the fresh wrongs with which these vile enactments threatened the common people. So, in a white heat, regardless of the expectations that *Pickwick Papers* was bound to have raised in the mind of his public, he cast aside the methods that had won him his first great success and wrote *Oliver Twist*. Out of the fire and fury of his indignation, but not out of his own experience of the evils therein described, he wrote that astounding book.

The whole workhouse gang and its infamous system : Bumble, Mr. Limbkins, Mr. Gamfield, the gentleman in the white waistcoat, Mr. Sowerberry, Mrs. Corney, and the rest : in all these he has created types so monstrous in their inhumanity that public opinion inevitably arose in revolt and insisted on the total abolition of a state of things that made such horrors possible. That

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state of things has not been abolished yet. Perhaps it never will be utterly abolished. But if the existence of such a state of things ever had, or ever could have, any justification of any kind—which seems hardly possible—that justification is to be found, at present, only in the fact that it moved Dickens to embark upon his first crusade against established iniquity, and inspired him with that zeal for public service which burned in him throughout the rest of his career.

So much for the propaganda side of *Oliver Twist*.

As to the soundness of his other purpose, in depicting the infamous crew that circled around the Jew Fagin, I am not so well satisfied; because to put it bluntly, he tried to depict what he had never seen, to describe a phase of life with which he was essentially unfamiliar, and so drew an unconvincing picture. Bill Sikes never was, or ever could be, a convincing type of the professional burglar. He is altogether too burly and coarse, too gross and clumsy—as a visit to any of our police-courts will prove to the most sceptical. And in Fagin, who was probably drawn from a notorious criminal of that time named Ikey Solomons (of whom there will be further mention) he sacrificed an effect of authenticity to his passion for the picturesque—as in the case of Squeers.

Neither do I agree with him that whilst “a

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Massaroni in green velvet is an enchanting creature . . . a Sikes in fustian is insupportable ;" or that "a Mrs. Massaroni, being a lady in short petticoats and a fancy dress . . . a thing to imitate in tableaux and have in lithograph on pretty songs . . . a Nancy, being a creature in a cotton gown and cheap shawl, is not to be thought of. It is wonderful (says Dickens in his preface to *Oliver Twist*) how virtue turns from dirty stockings ; and how Vice, married to ribbons and a little gay attire, changes her name, as wedded ladies do, and becomes Romance."

It would be wonderful if it were true. But it is not true, or we should none of us be so horribly fascinated, as deaf old Mrs. Wardle was, by the Fat Boy's desire to make our flesh creep, or so eager to listen to the fearsome tale that he has to unfold. I am inclined to think that deaf old Mrs. Wardle was a little disappointed in the Fat Boy's narrative. I have an idea that she expected at least a little gore, and would have been vastly more thrilled if it had been a murder and not merely a projected elopement that the Fat Boy had to divulge. And I am irresistibly persuaded to this belief by the fact that in all ages and in all climes human nature has never failed to evince a similar intense interest—morbid, if you like—in the most foul and revolting of crimes, in the most raw and crude villainy, in viciousness the most naked and unashamed, in

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degradation the most abject and nauseous. If this were not so, why should our present-day editors serve up for our delectation so many more columns of description, when they are dealing with some hideous story of murder and mutilation, than when they have only to tell us how some polite and genteel scoundrel has by devious courses succeeded in evading the Bankruptcy Court only to land himself at last in the abyss of gaol?

But at this early stage of his development Dickens was peculiarly susceptible—unlike most sanguine, ardent young men—to the influence of middle-class conventions: which is merely to say that, though he had learned to see aright, he had not yet learned to think aright—to think for himself, that is.

According to the accepted convention of his day, the thief and the prostitute, the pickpocket and the murderer, and all the rest of the criminal hoi polloi, were—to use a favourite word of that period—"low"; and, being "low," they must needs be also dirty and violent, crapulous and obscene. A like convention ordained that all decent and law-abiding people were superior, not only in outward seeming, but in mental capacity and spiritual grace, to these bestial outlaws. Dickens accepted both conventions and subscribed to them heartily: it was all a part of his childlike innocence; with the result that all the villains in his

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earlier books are instantly recognisable as villains at first sight, whilst all his good people exhale an unmistakable odour of sanctity; whereas the truth is, of course, that a villain's appearance of virtue is usually his best asset, and that if bad men went about like blind men, with descriptive labels attached to them, they would never be given a chance to do any wrong at all; equally is it true that an odour of sanctity may be assumed to smother the evil odour of a mind festering and rotting with disease.

Thus, in *Oliver Twist*, we have Dickens' burglars and his Nancys, his Artful Dodgers and his Noah Claypoles, and so on, all alike presented to us as beings from whom we should instinctively shrink in disgust; and we have, on the other hand, his Brothers Cherryble presented to us as two cherubic saints, whom to meet only once is to accept as embodiments of goodness, whom to know for but an hour is to love.

In his preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* he says, after having defended his delineation of Squeers and his denunciation of the whole race of schoolmasters for whom the figure of Squeers stands as the archetype: "To turn to a more pleasant subject, it may be right to say, that there *are* two characters in this book which are drawn from life. It is remarkable that what we call the world,



WILLIAM GRANT

One of the "Cheeryble Brothers"

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which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary ; and that, while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability. But those who take an interest in this tale will be glad to learn that the Brothers Cheeryble live ; that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature, and their unbounded benevolence, are no creations of the Author's brain ; but are prompting every day (and oftenest by stealth) some munificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honour. If I were to attempt to sum up the thousands of letters, from all sorts of people in all sorts of latitudes and climates, which this unlucky paragraph brought down upon me, I should get into an arithmetical difficulty from which I could not easily extricate myself. Suffice it to say that I believe the applications for loans, gifts, and offices of profit, that I have been requested to forward to the originals of the Brothers Cheeryble (with whom I never interchanged any communication in my life) would have exhausted the combined patronage of all the Lord Chancellors since the accession of the House of Brunswick, and would have broken the Rest of the Bank of England. The Brothers are now dead."

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One might add that they were never alive. Even the genius of their creator could not make them credible, implicitly as he believed in them.

But, in another sense, one asks: Were they really dead at the time when Dickens wrote the above words?

Forster says very definitely: "A friend now specially welcome also, was the novelist, Mr. Ainsworth, who shared with us incessantly for the three following years in the companionship which began at his (Dickens') house (in Devonshire Terrace); with whom we visited . . . friends of art and literature in his native Manchester, from among whom Dickens brought away his Brothers Cheeryble."

Mr. Kitton says:

In a literary sense Manchester can boast of . . . Dickensian associations, for here resided the originals of the delightful Cheeryble Brothers who (the author assures us in his preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*) were "very slightly and imperfectly sketched" from life. . . . The actual models whence he portrayed the Cheerybles with approximate accuracy were the Brothers Grant, William and Daniel, merchants of Ramsbottom and Manchester. . . . From evidence recently forthcoming . . . we learn that in 1838 (the year prior to the publication of *Nickleby*) he and Forster were the guests of Mr. Gilbert Winter, of Stocks House,

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Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester, to whom they went with a letter of introduction from Harrison Ainsworth. It was at Stocks House that Dickens became acquainted with the Grants. . . . The Reverend Hume Elliott informs us that although William and Daniel Grant had residences in Manchester, they preferred to live together at Springside, Ramsbottom, "which they made a veritable home of hospitality and good works," and it is fair to assume that Dickens must have seen at their home the original of David, "the apoplectic butler," or ascertained from an authentic source the peculiarities of Alfred (Boot), who served the Grants in a like capacity and possessed similar idiosyncrasies. . . . The rare combination of the qualities of charity and humanity with sound business instincts such as are ascribed to the Cheeryble Brothers, was exactly true of the Grants. On the death of William Grant, the elder brother, in 1842, the novelist, writing from Niagara Falls to his American friend, Professor Felton, said: "One of the noble hearts who sat for the Cheeryble Brothers is dead. If I had been in England I would certainly have gone into mourning for the loss of such a glorious life. His brother is not expected to survive him. . . . I am told that it appears from a memorandum found among the papers of the deceased that in his lifetime he gave away £600,000, or three million dollars." There is a marble tablet to the memory

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of William Grant in Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Ramsbottom, recording his "vigour of understanding, his spotless integrity of character, and his true benevolence of heart. . . . If you are in poverty," the inscription continues, "grieve for the loss of so good a friend ; if born to wealth and influence, think of the importance of such a trust, and earn in like manner by a life of charitable exertion the respect and love of all who knew you, and the prayers and blessings of the poor." Honoured descendants of the two philanthropists are still surviving in the city which cherishes their memory.

And Mr. Fitzgerald, who is equally circumstantial, says :

A portly volume of some 400 pages has been written on the subject of the Cheeryble Brothers—whose real name was Grant—most of which is devoted to an account of a Dissenting chapel with which they were connected, the Dundee Chapel it was called. The brothers were William, Daniel, John, and I think Charles. In their early days they kept a shop at Bury St. Edmund's, but migrated to Manchester, where they became leading merchants. The novelist's father always held them out to him as a pattern to imitate. They were well known for their philanthropic character. A Liverpool merchant, who came to ask assistance at a crisis, was given £10,000 without

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any security. One of the brothers was alive in 1855.

This was the brother who, according to the report echoed by Dickens, was not expected to survive his brother's death in 1842. The brother who died in 1842 was William Grant, of whom the following passage in *Nickleby* is said to give an excellent description :

He was a sturdy old fellow in a broad-skirted blue coat, made pretty large to fit easily, and with no particular waist; his bulky legs clothed in drab breeches and high gaiters, and his head protected by a low-crowned, broad-brimmed white hat, such as a wealthy grazier might wear. He wore his coat buttoned ; and his dimpled double chin rested in the folds of a white neckerchief—not one of your stiff-starched, apoplectic cravats, but a good easy old-fashioned white neck-cloth that a man might go to bed in and be none the worse for. But what principally attracted the attention of Nicholas was the old gentleman's eye—never was such a clear, twinkling, honest, merry, happy eye as that. And there he stood, looking a little upward with one hand thrust into the breast of his coat, and the other playing with his old-fashioned gold watch-chain ; his head thrown a little on one side, and his hat a little more on one side than his head (but that was evidently accident; not his ordinary way of wearing

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it), with such a pleasant smile playing about his mouth, and such a comical expression of mingled slyness, simplicity, kindheartedness, and good-humour lighting up his jolly old face, that Nicholas would have been content to have stood there, and looked at him until evening, and to have forgotten, meanwhile, that there was such a thing as a soured mind or a crabbed countenance to be met with in the whole wide world.

Now I think the most significant sentence in all the above extracts is that which mentions that Dickens' father had always held the Grant Brothers out to his son Charles as a pattern to imitate. The time is not yet for us to consider Dickens' father in the character of Mr. Micawber; but I think that these prosperous merchants would be just the kind of men that the John Dickens of this world do always set up as heroes. Your incurably unsuccessful man is almost invariably the warmest admirer of your successful man, so long as he does not come into personal contact with him. And so when the time came for the brilliant son of the poor failure to meet his father's ideal type in the flesh, it was natural that he should look at him with his father's eyes.

Who and what were these men, these four Brothers Grant? They were Scotsmen of Elchies. It is said that in their hot youth they tramped from their native place to Bury with all

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their worldly possessions tied up in a bundle. It is more usual for the future millionaire to descend upon the unfortunate country or town in which he is to make his millions with only half a crown in his pocket; and I have always been constrained to wonder if he had also a hundred pounds or so tied up in the tail of his shirt, since the crowning mystery of his career is invariably that sudden accession of capital which enables him to spring from penury into prosperity at one bound. It is, then, so much the more satisfactory to learn that the Brothers Grant brought their half-crowns in a bundle. It absolves them from that suspicion of indulging in some sharp practices—such as robbing their masters' till or cooking his accounts—which always does lurk at the back of my mind whenever I read the biographies of self-made men.

These young men had been graziers in Scotland, and had failed as graziers. Mr. Fitzgerald mentions incidentally that, before coming to Manchester, they had kept a shop in Bury St. Edmund's—and presumably again failed, this time as shopkeepers. But it is reassuring to know that, despite these and perhaps other early set-backs, they were miraculously enabled to set up as Woollen and Linen Drapers in their new domicile (no doubt on the contents of the bundle), and very soon were flourishing like the green bay tree: flourishing to such an extent that they could

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afford at least two residences, and could also lend ten thousand pounds without security, but not without hope of advertisement, or that transaction would never have been made public.

William Grant, who was obviously the chief moving spirit in the firm, seems to have been a man of character. He is said to have been extremely witty; and so it is a pity that the only sayings of his which tradition has preserved are the usual insolences of the lucky, boastful speculator.

He had a pet maxim: "Good masters make good workmen."

And his other good thing was said in reply to a remark by some one: "I believe, Mr. Grant, you were very poor when you came to these parts?"

"Oh yes," replied William with a droll twinkle of the eye—that same twinkle which Dickens had observed—"Oh yes. And if I had been *you* I should have remained poor!"

What the other man retorted is not on record, unfortunately; but if I had been in his shoes I should have said: "Yes, poor but honest."

Frankly, one does not like these Cheerybles or Grants. But then, as it is impossible for anyone to believe in them, no harm is done. And at least there is this beautiful aspect of their case, which is summed up in the surprising fact that Dickens did believe in them, in the simplicity of his glorious youth—or, rather, believed in his father's belief in them. He did believe—thanks to his father—



DANIEL GRANT

One of the "Cheeryble Brothers"

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that it is possible to be at once a millionaire and a humanitarian; and that it is a creditable thing for a man to laugh and grow fat whilst those out of whose labour he has made his riches do not laugh but oftener weep, and are mercifully saved from the vice of laziness by such hard work that they must remain of necessity thin.

“The Brothers are now dead.”

Oh, no doubt they are dead—very dead. And perhaps, after all, even Dickens' dear illusions about them had begun to fade a little by the time he wrote that sentence in his preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*. It would almost seem so; for never again do their like appear in any of his later work, although we have recognisable variations on the Brothers Grant in the Gradgrinds, Bounderbys, Merdles—the original of Merdle was the infamous John Sadler, forger and swindler, a sort of Whitaker Wright—Veneerings, and so on, of his final embittered period.

Our pleasure is now to dwell upon the real triumphs of *Nickleby*: Newman Noggs and Miss La Creevy; and upon those rather less likely characters, John Browdie and Smike: all four of whom are said to have been founded upon living prototypes.

“My friends,” wrote Sydney Smith, describing to Dickens the anxiety of some ladies of his acquaintance to meet him at dinner, “have not the

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smallest objection to be put into a number, but on the contrary would be proud of the distinction; and Lady Charlotte, in particular, you may marry to Newman Noggs."

History does not disclose the identity of this Lady Charlotte; but it is sufficiently revealed that she was a woman of nice discrimination and exquisite taste. Newman Noggs, whom we have all met in the flesh, and—if we are discerning—pitied with the pity that is akin to love, is one of those unfortunates who, having been dowered with all the virtues, are cursed by the addition of one small vice that renders all their virtues absurd and holds them up for evermore to the coarse ridicule or the stern obloquy or the silent contempt of their immeasurable inferiors, the cruel, the self-righteous, and the purblind or unthinking.

Newman Noggs was

a tall man of middle age, with two goggle eyes whereof one was a fixture, a rubicund nose, a cadaverous face, and a suit of clothes (if the term be allowable when they suited him not at all) much the worse for wear, very much too small, and placed upon such a short allowance of buttons that it was marvellous how he contrived to keep them on. . . . He gave a peculiar grunt, as his custom was at the end of all disputes with his master, to imply that he (Noggs) triumphed; and (as he rarely spoke to anybody unless some-

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body spoke to him) fell into a grim silence and rubbed his hands slowly over each other : cracking the joints of his fingers, and squeezing them into all possible distortions. The incessant performance of this routine on every occasion, and the communication of a fixed and rigid look to his unaffected eye, so as to make it uniform with the other, and to render it impossible for anybody to determine where or at what he was looking, were two among the numerous peculiarities of Mr. Noggs which struck an inexperienced observer at first sight. . . .

"Don't cry," says Newman Noggs to Kate Nickleby on a certain pitiful occasion. "Don't," said he, gliding out of his recess and accompanying her across the hall. "Don't cry, don't cry." Two very large tears, by the by, were running down Newman's face as he spoke.

"I see how it is," said poor Noggs, drawing from his pocket what seemed to be a very old duster, and wiping Kate's eyes with it as gently as if she were an infant. "You're giving way now. Yes, yes ; very good. That's right ; I like that. It was right not to give way before him. Yes, yes ! Ha, ha, ha ! Oh, yes. Poor thing !"

With these disjointed exclamations, Newman wiped his own eyes with the aforementioned duster, and, limping to the street door, opened it to let her out.

"Don't cry any more," whispered Newman. "I

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shall see you soon. Ha, ha, ha! . . . Yes, yes. Ho, ho!"

"God bless you," answered Kate, hurrying out. "God bless you."

"Same to you," rejoined Newman, opening the door again a little way to say so. "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

And Newman Noggs opened the door once again to nod cheerfully, and laugh—and shut it, to shake his head mournfully, and cry.

But yes, she was a woman of infinite womanliness, that unknown Lady Charlotte!

The real Newman Noggs was a certain Newman Knott, a broken-down ne'er-do-weel who had seen better days as a tenant-farmer. He used to call at irregular intervals at the office of Messrs. Blackmore & Ellis, during the time that Dickens was working for them as a clerk, for a weekly dole of seven shillings allowed him by some wealthy relative as the price of his self-immolation. He was apparently of that dissolute, queer, eccentric type which is still common enough in London. Like all his kind, having dissipated his past, he was ever eager to mortgage his future by forestalling his weekly dole. He used to borrow small sums from the clerks; and in lieu of interest they baited him. I daresay the boy Dickens baited him too, for boys are all imitative as monkeys; but, if so, he atoned hand-

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somely afterward by canonising him in the abstract.

It seems to me (for I accept the reality of Newman Noggs as implicitly as Lady Charlotte did) that this excellent creature, and not the Cheerybles' jackal, Tim Linkinwater—who, nevertheless, was a hearty old cock—should have married Miss La Creevy. He would have found ample consolation for his wasted life on the soft, if withered, bosom of that dear good little miniature painter, who, living by herself, overflowing with affections she had no one to enrich withal, was always cheerful by dint of industry and good-heartedness. The antic figure of that mincing young lady of fifty, in her preposterous yellow headdress recurs to the memory as one of the most winning in the gallery of Dickens' portraits. We see her, when she is disappointed in the character of a woman she has been to visit, easing her mind by saying cutting things at the woman's expense in a soliloquy, thereby draining her heart of its gall; and thereby, as she herself would have said, being a philosopher in her way, also illustrating one of the advantages of having lived alone so long that she had always made a confidant of herself; was as sarcastic as she could be, by herself, on the subject of people who offended her; pleased herself and did no harm.

She and Newman Noggs would have made a most excellent match; for they had both in excess

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the highest virtue—beside which all other virtues are as naught—the virtue of kindness. But she had, besides a certain measure of shrewdness and steadiness of purpose, which should have helped her heaven-sent consort to vindicate his manhood.

Miss La Creevy, it is said, was founded on a Miss Rose Emma Drummond, to whom Dickens sat for his portrait—and to whom she sat for her portrait—in 1835. The portrait was done on ivory, and given to his future wife, Miss Hogarth, as an engagement present. I have an idea, based upon nothing more substantial than a whimsy, that that miniature was rather a poor thing as art, and yet possessed a certain value of quaintness that lifted it above utter mediocrity.

There remain of this *Nickleby* group only Smike and John Browdie, neither of them very convincing figures.

It is said, on the authority of a Mrs. Ewebank whose husband once kept the King's Head Hotel at Barnard Castle, that John Browdie had a living original in one John F—— or S——, of Broadiswood, a farmer.

In the last chapter it is told how Dickens had gone down to Barnard Castle provided with some bogus letters of introduction to inspect the Yorkshire schools. One of the persons to be victimised by this fraud was this same John F—— or S——.

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Not being at home when the novelist called upon him, he journeyed through the snow to the inn where Dickens was staying, and entreated him to advise the (figmentary) widow (whom Dickens had invented for the occasion) to refrain from sending her boy to any of those wretched schools "while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnon, or a goother to lie asleep in!" The old coaching-house where this memorable interview is believed to have taken place (says Mr. Kitton in the passage I am now quoting) was the still existing Unicorn at Bowes.

Of the last of this group, Smike, it only remains to say that in 1889 an absurd old person, keeping a toyshop at Bury St. Edmund's, claimed to be the original of Crummles' ideal Apothecary. He is described as a tall, hatchet-faced, very aged and decrepit gentleman; and his claim was based upon the circumstance that when he was a boy he was sent to a school in Yorkshire by a wicked uncle and ran away from it. As if he were the only nephew that ever ran away from school!

Moreover, this egregious old toy-seller seems hardly to have realised that by living to a ripe old age, and thus dispelling any atmosphere of pathos that may attach to Smike's death, he had robbed himself of his only possible claim upon our affectionate interest.





JOHN DICKENS

"Mr Micawber"

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH
RELICS FROM THE OLD
CURIOSITY SHOP



CHAPTER THE SEVENTH RELICS FROM THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

IN HIS NEXT BOOK AFTER *NICHOLAS NICKLEBY* we find Dickens dipping a little deeper yet into the seemingly bottomless well of his early experiences. He was still working at high pressure, turning from project to project with that restless hunger after new food for his genius which was one of his most amazing characteristics, and doing with all his might whatsoever his hand found to do, as if it were the only thing to be done, with equally characteristic self-confidence and self-abandonment.

The splendour of his achievements during the first six years of his career, during which period he published six immensely long books, certainly writing every word of five of them, besides engaging in all manner of outside tasks, editorial and other, is now a little dimmed by the mists of time ; but if we consider that not all Mr. J. M. Barrie's twenty-five years of labour has produced in mere bulk such an output of words, we get a little nearer perhaps to a realisation of the inexhaustible fecundity, the untiring industry, and the prodigious powers of application that would have made Dickens, had he been the veriest hack, a phenomenon of letters. Only the first Dumas can bear comparison with him in this particular regard ; and Dumas, we have reason to suspect, kept a kind of literary factory in which

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he employed many hands for the turning out of romance, as if by machinery. Moreover, Dumas had his materials ready-made to draw upon at will ; whereas Dickens, at any rate until this time, had to spin his material out of his own interior like a spider.

The Old Curiosity Shop was begun as a mere sketch, done in a hurry and without any thought of further development. From that tentative beginning it grew spontaneously out of the exuberance of its author's fancy, taking on form and substance as it grew, budding and sprouting luxuriantly, throwing out wide branches like a tree, bearing abundance of sweetest flowers and ripest fruit, and at last, as it were, dying of its own furious energy, shedding its sere and withered leaves in whirling gringolades, that fell ever slower and more slowly until they rested on the melancholy earth, cold and dank as fresh-turned graves and sodden as with 'a rain of tears.

Dickens' life was one long series of experiments. For it was at once his good fortune and his misfortune to serve his apprenticeship to his art in public. The slips and trips, the fumbings and stumblings, the faulty workmanship of uncongenial tasks hastily scamped and left half-finished with all their rawness and crudeness of outline stark to view : these inevitable blunders and mistakes, these ghastly failures that usually are perpetrated in secrecy, in the agony and bloody

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sweat, the tears and bitter heartbreak of solitude : which solitude has nevertheless its compensations in that it hides the shame of our defeat from other eyes than ours, and spares us many blushes in the future : all these ordeals by trial of faith which are incidental to the greatest of careers, Dickens had to undergo in the full glare of that fierce white light which beats upon the bays of fame.

And Dickens was famous before he had cut his wisdom teeth. The world had discovered him before he had discovered himself. From that moment in which, lightheartedly, he accepted a commission for a "series of sporting sketches," and set him down to fulfil a business contract in a business-like way, and yet in a sort of careless rapture, too, born of his youth : from that moment he was ordained to the religion of humanity as surely and irrevocably as any acolyte is ordained to the religion of the Church. From that moment his foot was set upon the slippery way. But he climbed the steep toilsome ascent not alone, as the vast majority of his fellows have done. He climbed in the full light of day with multitudes of spectators lining his path on either hand, with the gaze of countless eyes fixed intently upon him, with a babble and tumult of voices applauding, encouraging, triumphing in his triumph—nay, turning his very failures into triumphs by the din of their acclaim.

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A spectacle for the gods! A spectacle to bring tears into the eyes and misgivings into the hearts of those more staid and calm who stood aloof from the rabble, and to whom all such valorous displays of youthful daring are occasions for self-searching and regret. He stood forth before the thunderous throng, as of old the Roman gladiators stood forth in the arena of death before their emperor and his glittering train of courtiers and satellites; but in no mood of *Ave Cæsar! We who are about to die salute thee!* His form was as the form of a child. His face was as a child's face, bright and happy in the sunshine of universal favour. There was the unconscious grace of childhood in his easy unaffected pose; and the sublime graciousness of childhood in his gay acceptance of these plaudits as his right. These reverend elders, these grave and wise seigneurs! surely if they believed in him he must of sheer necessity believe in himself! . . .

That, as it seems to me, was Dickens' attitude toward the world. That was why he failed so often, and never knew that he failed. That was why he failed so seldom, and never knew that he had attained greatness. . . .

Fantastic, all this? Perhaps it is. A little beside the point? Maybe. But then, what would you? I know it is a dreadful thing to be enthusiastic in these bloodless days. I know that to be in earnest and to be carried away by your earnest-

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ness is a grievous fault, a fault never committed in the best society ; that to rejoice in your theme and to let the voice of your rejoicing rise to Heaven is a sin beyond say the pardon of Mr. St. Loe Strachey ; that to say what your heart, rather than your head, impels you to say, and that without regard to the formulas of the schoolmen is to outrage all the fair—or is it unfair ?—canons of art ; and that to be honest is to be indecent. . . . “Gentlemen,” said a sportive sage, who had been playing leapfrog with some fellow-sages, or indulging in some similar flippancy ; “gentlemen, we must be serious. Here comes a fool.”

How can one be serious in the company of Dick Swiveller ? One could conceivably have been serious in the company of Newman Noggs, Dick’s father. There was that incident of the duster. . . . But with this tremendous fellow, this rakehell, this heart-breaker, this lineal descendant of the hosts of Rabelais, this more blithe and gay and reckless young Hopeful, this child of the devil and happiness, chip of the old block as he is, this humorous dog who greets us at the very outset of our acquaintance with the query, breathed in a sigh of resignation to the drabness of an everyday world after an evening red : “ But what . . . is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather ! What is the odds so long as the spirit is expanded by means of rosy

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wine, and the present moment is the least happiest of our existence!" And again: "There is a proverb which talks about being merry and wise. There are some people who can be merry and can't be wise, and some who can be wise (or think they can) and can't be merry. I'm one of the first sort. If the proverb's a good 'un, I suppose it is better to keep to half of it than none; at all events I'd rather be merry and not wise than be like you—neither one nor t'other."

Frankly, it seems to me to be impossible for anyone not a professional tea-taster to keep a straight face in the presence of this most reprehensible person. So that if, as I do verily believe, Dick Swiveller is the son and heir of Newman Noggs; and if, as we are told, Newman Noggs was in real life Mr. Newman Knott; and if Mr. Newman Knott embodied in himself only a suggestion of his offspring's gorgeous personality, then I can only marvel at the stupidity, and be sorry for the meanness of that unfortunate gentleman's relatives, and most heartily approve the generosity and wisdom of Dickens' fellow-clerks' conduct in pandering to that immortal being's carnal lusts.

Out of his past Dickens drew inspiration for at least three of the characters that illumine the gloom of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

There was, first of all, the Poet of Mrs. Jarley's



MRS COOPER

"Little Dorrit"



THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

Waxworks. Mr. Slum makes only a very brief appearance upon the stage ; but I think he should be given his chance, as he belongs to a *milieu* that Dickens seems to have had a strange distaste for. He was

. . . a tallish gentleman with a hook nose and black hair, dressed in a military surtout very short and tight in the sleeves, and which had once been frogged and braided all over, but was now sadly shorn of its garniture and quite threadbare—dressed too in ancient grey pantaloons fitting tight to the leg, and a pair of pumps in the winter of their existence. . . . He looked in at the door and smiled affably. Mrs. Jarley's back being then towards him, the military gentleman shook his forefinger as a sign that her myrmidons were not to apprise her of his presence, and stealing up close behind her, tapped her on the neck, and cried playfully "Boh!"

"What, Mr. Slum!" cried the lady of the waxwork. "Lor! who'd have thought of seeing you here!"

"'Pon my soul and honour," said Mr. Slum, "that's a good remark. 'Pon my soul and honour that's a wise remark. Who *would* have thought it! . . . I came here . . . 'pon my soul and honour I hardly know what I came here for. It would puzzle me to tell you, it would by Gad. I wanted a little inspiration, a little freshening up, a little

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change of ideas, and—'pon my soul and honour," said the military gentleman, checking himself and looking round the room, "whata devilish classical thing this is! By Gad, it's quite Minervan!"

"It'll look well enough when it comes to be finished," observed Mrs. Jarley.

"Well enough!" said Mr. Slum. "Will you believe me when I say it's the delight of my life to have dabbled in poetry, when I think I've exercised my pen upon this charming theme? By the way—any orders? Is there any little thing I can do for you?"

"It comes so very expensive, sir," replied Mrs. Jarley, "and I really don't think it does much good."

"Hush! No, no!" returned Mr. Slum, elevating his hand. "No fibs. I'll not hear it. Don't say it don't do good. Don't say it. I know better!"

"I don't think it does," said Mrs. Jarley.

"Ha, ha!" cried Mr. Slum, "you're giving way, you're coming down. Ask the perfumers, ask the blacking-makers, ask the hatters, ask the old lottery-office-keepers—ask any man among 'em what my poetry has done for him, and mark my words, he blesses the name of Slum. If he's an honest man he raises his eyes to heaven, and blesses the name of Slum — mark that! You are acquainted with Westminster Abbey, Mrs. Jarley?"

"Yes, surely."

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"Then upon my word and honour, ma'am, you'll find in a certain angle of that dreary pile, called Poets' Corner, a few smaller names than Slum," retorted that gentleman, tapping himself expressively on the forehead to imply that there was some slight quantity of brain behind it. "I've got a little trifle here now," said Mr. Slum, taking off his hat which was full of scraps of paper, "a little trifle here, thrown off in the heat of the moment, which I should say was exactly the thing you wanted to set this place on fire with. It's an acrostic—the name at this moment is Warren, but the idea's a convertible one, and a positive inspiration for Jarley. Have the acrostic."

"I suppose it's very dear," said Mrs. Jarley.

"Five shillings," returned Mr. Slum, using his pencil as a toothpick. "Cheaper than any prose."

"I couldn't give more than three," said Mrs. Jarley.

"——And six," retorted Slum. "Come. Three and six."

Mrs. Jarley was not proof against the poet's insinuating manner, and Mr. Slum entered the order in a small note-book as a three-and-six-penny one. Mr. Slum then withdrew to alter the acrostic, after taking a most affectionate leave of his patroness, and promising to return, as soon as he possibly could, with a fair copy for the printer.

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It is unworthy of me, but somehow I have an uneasy feeling that Mr. Slum did not return as soon as he possibly could; and that when he did return it was with something utterly unsuitable. But before giving reasons for this lack of faith, a digression.

Dickens, in his early childhood—as all the world knows, I suppose—worked in a blacking factory. The firm for which he worked was an enterprising firm. It is in connection with one of their advertising dodges, by the way, that one of the neatest puns in existence was once made. They employed men to chalk on the pavement these words: “Warren’s blacking is the best.” But the authorities forbade this; and so the work had to be done by stealth. One day a famous wit—I forget his name—was walking with a friend when he saw upon the flags the legend—left thus by one of the chalkers in the hurry of flight from the powers that were—“Warren’s B——.” “The rest,” said the wit, “is lacking.”

It was for this firm, then, that Dickens worked; and attached to the staff were certain rhymsters. It was from one of these camp-followers that Dickens made his study of Mr. Slum.

I can conceive that the tribe of Slum was unsavoury as any tribe of Bedouins. And yet, from the above-quoted passage, it would seem that, barring an extra shade of dinginess and disreputable-

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ness and shamelessness, its manners and habits have changed but little in a hundred years. And I speak as one having authority. I have sat in the editorial chair. I have had to interview these gentry daily. I know their ways. And I aver that they are Slum-like, some of them, to the core. They are Slum-like in their airy playfulness, in their poor pathetic pretence at having no definite business on hand as they drift into your office, in their gamesome approach to the point and purpose of their visit, and in the jauntiness of their aspect thinly veiling a haggard solicitude. Above all are they akin in their lofty indifference to the sordid details of barter, in their aptness at improving on a price offered, in their prompt acceptance of the agreed terms, their alacrity in clinching a bargain, and their dilatoriness in fulfilling their part of it, after you have fulfilled your part. Beyond this, there is about Mr. Slum the unmistakable taint of the greasy, frowsy Bohemian, all the civilised world over, which endures even unto this day ; and which testifies alike to the truth and the skill of Dickens' solitary presentment of this type. For, as a rule, he abstained from "shop"—even the big "shop" of literature. But . . . one wonders what he would have made of a novel in the vein of *Pendennis*, a *Pendennis* pitched a little lower in the social scale, of course.

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Of his sufferings during those dark years of his boyhood in which he worked in the blacking factory Dickens has written thus feelingly in *David Copperfield*:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned and thought and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more, cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations that even now . . . I often forget in my dreams that . . . I am a man, and wander desolately back to that time of my life. . . . From Monday morning until Saturday night I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind. . . . I know that I lounged about the streets insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little

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vagabond. . . . That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. No man's imagination can overstep the reality. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. . . . My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless and abandoned as such altogether ; though I am solemnly convinced that I never, for one hour, was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy.

At first, he writes in a letter to Forster referring to the early days of his father's incarceration in the Marshalsea, " my mother and my brothers and sisters—excepting Fanny in the Royal Academy of Music—were still encamped, with a young servant-girl from Chatham Work-house, in the two parlours in the emptied house in Gower Street North."

There were some feeble attempts to come to some arrangement with the creditors, which failed. Then the establishment in Gower Street North was broken up, and the family, with the exception of Charles, went to live with John Dickens in the debtors' prison. Says Dickens :

The key of the house was sent back to the landlord, who was very glad to get it ; and I (small Cain that I was, except that I had never done harm to anyone) was handed over as a lodger to a reduced old lady, long known to our family, in

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Little College Street, Camden Town, who took children in to board. . . . I felt keenly, however, the being so cut off from my parents, my brothers, and sisters ; and, when my day's work was done, going home to such a miserable blank ; and *that*, I thought, might be corrected. One Saturday night I remonstrated with my father on this head, so pathetically and with so many tears, that his kind nature gave way. He began to think that it was not quite right. I do believe he had never thought so before, or thought about it. It was the first remonstrance I had ever made about my lot, and perhaps it opened up a little more than I intended. A back-attic was found for me at the house of an insolvent court-agent, who lived in Lant Street in the Borough.

Says Forster :

What was to him (Charles) of course the great pleasure of his paradise of a lodging was its bringing him again, though after a fashion sorry enough, within the circle of home. From this time he used to breakfast "at home," in other words in the Marshalsea; going to it as early as the gates were open, and for the most part much earlier. They had no want of bodily comforts there. His father's income, still going on, was amply sufficient for that; and in every respect indeed but elbow-room, I have heard him say, the family lived more comfortably in prison than they had done for a long time out of it. They were waited

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on still by the maid-of-all-work from Bayham Street, the orphan girl from the Chatham Workhouse, from whose sharp little worldly and also kindly ways he took his first impression of the Marchioness in the *Old Curiosity Shop*. She too had a lodging in the neighbourhood that she might be early on the scene of her duties ; and when Charles met her, as he would do occasionally, in his lounging-place by London Bridge, he would occupy the time before the gates opened by telling her quite astonishing fictions about the wharves and the Tower. " But I hope I believed them myself," he would say. Besides breakfast, he had supper also in the prison ; and got to his lodging generally at nine o'clock. The gates closed always at ten.

I must not omit (Forster goes on) what he told me of the landlord of this little lodging. He was a fat, good-natured, kind old gentleman. He was lame, and had a quiet old wife ; and he had a very innocent, grown-up son, who was lame too. They were all very kind to the boy. He (Charles) was taken with one of his old attacks of spasm one night, and the whole three of them were about his bed until morning. They were all dead when he told me this, but in another form they live still very pleasantly as the Garland family in the *Old Curiosity Shop*.

So much and no more seems to be known of the Garlands and the Marchioness ; but I have yielded to the temptation to include them in this

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chapter, and to dwell (I hope at not undue length) upon the circumstances in which Dickens made their acquaintance, because I feel that, alongside the figure of the Poet Slum, they stand for a good deal. They stand for the indomitable spirit of Dickens which even in his boyhood lifted him above the hardships and the uglinesses of life and enabled him to mingle some laughter with his tears. . . . For I cannot believe that his delight in these companions of that squalid time was wholly retrospective.

In the same genre, but not nearly so closely related to life as the real heroine of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is Little Dorrit. To believe in the humanity of the Marchioness is easy; but to believe in the humanity of Little Dorrit is to strain one's faith a little. Yet Little Dorrit had also—has still, we hope—a living prototype.

Her name is Mrs. Mary Ann Cooper. She was the playmate and contemporary of Dickens, a recipient of some of his youthful confidences, and finally—her supreme achievement—the inspiration of his *Child of the Marshalsea*. She lives in the old-world village of Southgate, where, a year and a half ago, she was discovered by a journalist, and interviewed—to this effect: *

I marvelled at the facility with which this old lady of ninety-eight set back the hands of time. A short pause, a slight lifting of the forefinger, a

* *Evening Times*, November 26, 1910.

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roll of the eyes, and a puckering of the brow were all the external evidences of how the retrospect was being prepared. Half a century was annihilated in this flash to the days of Dickens. She lived again in the '30's and '40's, and was able to roll out the drama of the past with a command of language astonishing to one of a modern education.

Her story of Dickens—Mr. Dickens, as she insists upon referring to the great novelist in company—dealt with events and incidents of a homely interest usually outside the scope of the biographer. She took me back to the days of imprisonment for debt, and to scenes in the Marshalsea prison, in which Dickens' father was lodging at the time she became acquainted with the family.

Mrs. Cooper's family were farmers at Sunbury, but owing to the illness of her mother, much of her youth was spent under the care of a nurse at a farm in Somers Town. . . .

It was here . . . that the friendship with Dickens was established, and here that she was given the sobriquet of "Little Dorrit" long before the name was immortalised by the pen of her companion. As is shown in the writings of his biographers, Dickens had a fondness for nicknames, some of which were created without the slightest regard to relation or applicability. What provoked the application of "Little Dorrit" to the then Mary Ann Mitton is a matter of mystery to the lady herself. . . .

With what enthusiasm Mrs. Cooper told of the

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days when Dickens, who was four or five years her senior, used to visit her home at Sunbury for rest and recuperation! After hard work in the gallery of the House of Commons or long hours of study in the chambers which he shared with young Mitton (Mary Ann Mitton's brother) he would rush off each Saturday for the Sunbury coach, and would spend a delightful week-end in ruraldom.

It was at such times that he gave full play to the mischievous instincts of his boyhood. Bird-nesting, egg-stealing, rabbit-hunting, and bird-catching were mixed up with fishing, tramps over the fields, and story-telling round the fire-side. "Little Dorrit" was the co-partner in most of his antics and was always ready to join in any expedition of adventure.

"Little Dorrit" tells how Dickens used to persuade her to miss Sunday afternoon service at St. Pancras Church, in order to visit places of interest in the City. He would always foreshadow some alluring treat in the way of a visit to the Tower, fun with the beadles, or adventures in the parks.

Then (says the journalist) my Victorian hostess took me to the days when fame and fortune entered into the life of her hero, and with a touch of insouciance, remarked that he began to move in circles far away beyond the ken of a simple country girl. Her own marriage was the beginning of the severance in the long association, although the intimate companionship between Dickens and her brother was maintained throughout his life.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH
FAMILY PORTRAITS



THE WORST THINGS THAT HAPPEN
to us are sometimes the best for us.

In the material sense it was a bad thing for Dickens to have a Micawber for a father, a Mrs. Nickleby for a mother, and a pervasive atmosphere of shabby-genteel vagabondage in which to grow up. In the spiritual sense, however, it was a good thing; because such parents and such an environment provided him with just the necessary incentives to initiative and enterprise. A father of the Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel type might have made of Charles precisely what that gentleman of wealth and honour and a somewhat lamentable history made of his son Richard: a supercilious, cultured cad. He, like that unfortunate youth, would have been nourished on aphorisms and moulded to a system which fitted him about as well as the original egg-shell fits the full-grown cockerel. Or, speaking more generally, he might have come into a world newly cushioned and upholstered and padded for his reception, in which to tumble about at his pleasure; and, never having hurt himself in his tumbles, to lose altogether at last the knack of maintaining his equilibrium.

Almost any kind of father would have been a better kind of father than John Dickens was: that is to say, a better kind of father for an aver-

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age child. But for the child who is not average, for the child who is destined to be a genius, the less parental control and guidance the better. I think it is Mr. Zangwill who says, though I may be misquoting his exact words, that it takes a man of a certain talent to sire a genius. If Mr. Zangwill had said that it takes a man of an uncertain talent—the sort of man who buries his talent in a napkin, thus hiding it from the world, and maybe from himself; and who, as a result goes about the world fluking things instead of doing them—if Mr. Zangwill had said that it takes this kind of man to sire a genius I would be the more inclined to agree with him.

A genius is the only free man. All other men—one hates to have to use this kind of *cliche*, but in the present instance there seems to be no help for it—all other men, then, are the slaves of their heredity and environment, instead of being the masters thereof. And not a thousand Max Nordaus, nor a million of his disciples, shall convince me that genius is ever decadent. On the contrary, genius is always the supreme expression of some one or other among the highest aspirations of which mankind is capable. And I am not now narrowing genius down to the genius of art or literature or music, or even religion. There is a genius of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom. There is perhaps even that genius which Carlyle comically defines as an infinite capacity



"THE DUEL" From a Painting by Frank Stone.

Introducing Tenbyson, Dickens and Miss Figgart.

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for taking pains : that kind of genius which devotes a lifetime to the study of (say) toxic alkaloids, and thus adds one more good grain of mortar to the Temple of Science. There are as many kinds of genius as there are fields of activity still left open for mankind to explore.

And there, it may be, you have the secret of genius: the genius is an explorer, a pioneer. He follows his bent to its logical conclusion, oftentimes not knowing whither it will lead him, but following it resolutely, unfalteringly, until it brings him up against the mysterious Something he has been searching for. You know how the natural, simple, straightforward, innocent child will wander out into a wide field on tottering feet in quest of it knows not what, and moon along and re-discover all sorts of old things and exult in them as new miracles. To such a child the perpetual parental injunction : "Come back!" "Don't go there!" "You must not do that, say that, touch that!" is usually fatal. At first the child rebels, pursues his course, and then . . . is caught up and dragged away and perhaps knocked about . . . for its ultimate good, of course. The child thereupon begins to realise with a sort of weary bitter heart-sickness that this is a world of forbidden things, a world of prohibitions and denials. It is very annoying, very stultifying, very unsatisfactory. But being only a child he gives in at last to superior force

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or for the sake of the loaves and fishes, acquiesces languidly in an accepted order of things, and gradually schools himself little by little to follow the line of least resistance. He is less fortunate than the child of the untutored savage who, being flung headlong into a deep pool, must needs swim by instinct for dear life.

Little Charles Dickens, cursed and blessed with parents who had no guiding principles at all, who drifted before the winds of circumstance like balls of thistle-down in a gale, was spared the iron hand of discipline, thwarting and crippling him. Some rudimentary morality, of course; some glimmerings of a Most High; some conception of a co-ordinated scheme of things in which each human atom was cast to play its appointed part; some dim perception of a vast abstraction, vaguely and variously referred to as Civilisation, Decency, Respectability, Public Opinion, Right and Wrong, and so on: some sense of all these queer social anomalies was inevitably grafted upon his green burgeoning mind, and duly fulfilled their function in colouring its tone and coarsening its texture. But apart from these limitations of his natural proclivities, he was mercifully exempt from those deadly restraining influences under which children more amenable to authority wilt into youth and fade into manhood or womanhood.

Imagine Dickens as the only son of a Nonconformist parson, with a Quakeress for a mother.

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Even then he would, no doubt, being a genius, have achieved some measure of emancipation. He would have moved more freely than his fellows, but only within or only a little beyond their limits. As the twig is bent so is the tree inclined ; but the tree that stands alone stretches straight up toward the sky.

" Pray, Mr. Dickens," someone asked of Charles' father, " where was your son educated ? "

" Why, indeed, sir—ha, ha !—he may be said to have educated himself," was the reply.

An apt rejoinder enough, in a way ; but it would have been truer to say that " Life in her creaking shoes," with her cruel birch, had been his real schoolmistress.

John Dickens was one of those men who are loved not for themselves, but for what they might have been if they were other than they are. This is not too clear, perhaps ; but I think it expresses the cloudy fact, which is, that there are certain of our fellow-creatures who seem to exhale a sort of *aura* of goodwill and good-humour through which it is well-nigh impossible to pierce to the sorry reality of flesh and blood, heart and mind. They not only deceive themselves, but in some indefinable way succeed in deceiving others also. They believe that they are wise ; and, though they are foolish, the world shares their belief. They believe that they are uniformly unfortunate

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in all that they undertake ; and, although their repeated failures are obviously due to their own ineptitude the world sympathises with them, and agrees with them, " They *mean* well," it is said ; and their good intentions count for more than other men's good deeds. I think that John Dickens was that kind of man.

At the time of Charles' birth he was a clerk, under Government, in the navy-pay office stationed at Portsmouth.

When Charles was two years old the family removed to Chatham. There they stayed for eight years, and then, in 1822, John Dickens was recalled to Somerset House. In the winter of that year he departed by coach for London, accompanied by his wife and children, with the exception of Charles, who was left behind for a few weeks longer in the care of a schoolmaster, William Giles.

It was during these few weeks of separation from his parents and brothers and sisters that the lonely little boy, probably in search of relief from his loneliness, made his first intimate acquaintance with books. Says he :

My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Hum-*

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phry Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe came out, a glorious host, to keep me company.

But very soon—all too soon, perhaps, seeing what new friends Charles had lately made—the day arrived for him to follow the rest of the Dickens family to London. It was in the early spring of 1823 that Charles Dickens entered London for the first time. His first impressions, however, were not of the brightest, he having (as he afterwards observed) “exchanged everything that had given his ailing little life its picturesqueness or sunshine” for the comparatively sordid environment of a London suburb, and suffered the deprivation of the companionship of his playfellows at Chatham to become a solitary lad under circumstances that could not fail (says Mr. Kitton) to make sorrowful the stoutest heart, not the least depressing being his father’s money involvement with consequent poverty at home. John Dickens, whose financial affairs demanded retrenchment, had rented “a mean small tenement” in Bayham Street, Camden Town.

The misery and depression of spirits from which Charles suffered whilst living here must be attributed (Mr. Kitton goes on to say) to family adversity and his own isolated condition rather than to the character of his environment. At this time his father’s pecuniary resources

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became so circumscribed as to compel the observance of the strictest domestic economy, and prevented him from continuing his son's education. "As I thought," said Dickens on one occasion very bitterly, "in the little back-garret in Bayham Street, of all I had lost in losing Chatham, what would I have given—if I had had anything to give—to have been sent back to any other school, to have been taught something anywhere!"

Instead of improving the elder Dickens' affairs went from bad to worse, and all ordinary efforts to propitiate his creditors having been exhausted, Mrs. Dickens laudably resolved to attempt a solution of the difficulty by means of a school for young ladies.

Says Forster, of this desperate epoch :

The time was now come for her to exert herself, she said ; and she "must do something." The godfather down at Limehouse was reported to have an Indian connection. People in the East Indies always sent their children home to be educated. She would set up a school. They would all grow rich by it. And then, thought the sick boy, "perhaps even I might go to school myself."

A house was soon found at number four, Gower Street North; a brass plate on the door announced

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MRS. DICKENS' ESTABLISHMENT; and the result may be given in the exact words of the then small actor in the comedy, whose hopes it had raised so high. "I left, at a great many doors, a great many circulars calling attention to the merits of the establishment. Yet nobody ever came to school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come, or that the least preparation was ever made to receive anybody. But I know that we got on very badly with the butcher and the baker; that very often we had not too much for dinner; and that at last my father was arrested." The interval between the sponging-house and the prison was passed by the sorrowful lad in running errands and carrying messages for the prisoner, delivered with swollen eyes and through shining tears; and the last words said to him by his father before he was finally carried to the Marshalsea were to the effect that the sun had set upon him for ever. "I really believed at the time," said Dickens, "that they had broken my heart."

Of Dickens' first visit to the Marshalsea he has written thus in a letter that was afterwards turned to account in *David Copperfield*:

My father was waiting for me in the lodge, and we went up to his room (on the top storey but one) and cried very much. And he told me, I remember, to take warning by the Marshalsea,

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and to observe that if a man had twenty pounds a year, and spent nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings, and sixpence, he would be happy ; but that a shilling spent the other way would make him wretched. I see the fire we sat before, now ; with two bricks inside the rusted grate, one on each side, to prevent its burning too many coals. Some other debtor shared the room with him, who came in by-and-by ; and as the dinner was a joint stock repast, I was sent up to " Captain Porter " in the room overhead, with Mr. Dickens' compliments, and I was his son, and could he, Captain P., lend me a knife and fork ?

Captain Porter lent the knife and fork, with his compliments in return. There was a very dirty lady in his little room ; and two wan girls, his daughters, with shock heads of hair. I thought I should not have liked to borrow Captain Porter's comb. The Captain himself was in the last extremity of shabbiness ; and if I could draw at all, I would draw an accurate portrait of the old, old, brown great-coat he wore, with no other coat below it. His whiskers were large. I saw his bed rolled up in a corner ; and I knew (God knows how) that the two girls with the shock heads were Captain Porter's natural children, and that the dirty lady was not married to Captain P.

This Captain Porter was, obviously, the original of Captain Hopkins in *David Copperfield*.

And then the luck turned, as luck always does

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turn for men of the John Dickens type, though better men starve.

A rather considerable legacy from a relative accrued to John Dickens. This, in addition to the official pension due for long service at Somerset House, enabled him to meet his financial responsibilities, with the result that the Marshalsea knew him no more.

Charles, however, still remained in the blacking business, until, as the result of a quarrel between John Dickens and James Lamert, who had obtained the post for the boy, the father declared that his son should leave and go to school instead.

He went to school, at Wellington House Academy, in Granby Street, Hampstead Road. Wellington House Academy, and its proprietor, Mr. William Jones, are satirised as Salem House and Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*. There Charles remained for two years, "without achieving any particular distinction as a pupil," which, in the circumstances, was not remarkable. And that was all the scholastic education Dickens ever received.

On leaving school Charles was immediately sent to work. He went as office-boy to a Mr. Molloy, a solicitor. His father, however, presently transferred him to another firm, with whom he stayed for three or four years.

Meanwhile John Dickens had learnt shorthand and obtained an appointment as reporter on the

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Morning Herald. In the profession of journalism Charles followed him in 1828, and six years afterward achieved fame with *Pickwick*.

Two years later we find him journeying to Exeter to make a new home for his prodigal parents in that locality, and there they settled. That he had done more than his duty by them is apparent from one of his letters in which he describes the cottage he rented for them, and its surroundings. "I do assure you," he says, writing to his friend, Mr. Thomas Mitton, "that I am charmed with the place and the beauty of the country round about, though I have not seen it under very favourable circumstances. . . . It is really delightful, and when the house is to rights and the furniture all in, I shall be quite sorry to leave it. . . . The situation is charming; meadows in front; an orchard running parallel to the garden hedge, richly wooded hills closing in the prospect behind, and, away to the left, before a splendid view of the hill on which Exeter is situated, the cathedral towers rising up into the sky in the most picturesque manner possible. I don't think I ever saw so cheerful and pleasant a spot."

Thus Mr. and Mrs. John Dickens rode safely into harbour, and so remained at anchorage at last—until 1851, when the father died. He was buried in Highgate cemetery, and the tombstone placed over him by his illustrious son offers tribute

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to his "zealous, useful, cheerful spirit." His wife survived him twelve years.

Such is the record of John Dickens, a typical Englishman, with the typical English habit of muddling along, of muddling through, somehow, anyhow. He was, essentially, you know, rather a rascal; but a genial rascal, a rascal with a flourish and an air. He swindled poor tradesmen out of their store; but he had a saving grace, which is lacking from some others of his kidney, in that he swindled them without at the same time patronising and scorning them. I am pretty sure that he addressed his infuriated bootmaker or tailor as "My dear Mr. Snob . . . or Snip," as the case might be. I am pretty sure that when he called to give a fresh order for wine he was careful to be polite to the vintner's wife, paying her courtly compliments, and to take kindly notice of the vintner's children, patting them on the head, pinching their cheeks, and even scattering largess of pennies among them. He was hail-fellow-well-met with all classes alike. He would be that kind of man. And there are many of his kind to be met with, nowadays as thenadays, at the clubs and elsewhere. But . . . the ugly doubt obtrudes: Was there not something rather mean and shabby and furtive beneath all this magnificence and magniloquence?

It is to be borne in mind that he started life as

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a clerk under Government : as one of that species of superior being blessed above all that toil and spin : a Civil Servant—and trebly blessed in those days, when an influential friend and not a vulgar competitive examination was the only *Open Sesame* to a fine fat sinecure. If he had been some poor devil of an artist or author, chopping his brains into faggots to keep the domestic pot a-boiling, there would have been some excuse for his thriftlessness. But he married on an assured income. He knew just exactly what his prospects were. He had a pension to look forward to. Moreover he had given hostages to Fortune, and it was his plain bounden duty to redeem his pledge by so ordering his life as to balance equitably his liabilities with his assets. Indeed he seems to have been wantonly and even wickedly reckless and improvident ; one suspects some gross and callous self-indulgence somewhere. He was “thoughtless,” as we say, which, being interpreted, means “heartless,” more often than not. He was one of those who can smile and smile and be a villain with impunity, with credit even. The base sordid fact of his being cravenly incapable of facing the world and holding himself erect under the burden of his obligations he cloaked within a rare embroidery of fine words and swept aside with spacious gestures. His little boy he cast with one of those gestures to the winds of chance. And even when his fortunes

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were retrieved, by no merit of his, he let his little boy drudge on in menial servitude, uncared for and alone, only withdrawing him from that degrading employment, in order to vindicate his own flatulent dignity, after having had a tiff with the brother-in-law who had befriended him in his hour of need. For two years his sense of outraged dignity sustained him in the performance of his fatherly duty ; and then his child is once more pitched neck and crop into the world, to work again at the first sorry trade that offers : at any trade, it matters not what, so long as it brings in a few shillings a week, though by this time John Dickens was drawing his pension and earning other money besides by his reporting. Truly there is a touch of colossal selfishness, almost criminal, in this attitude of the improvident, indifferent father toward the eager, willing, loving child of light whom he has begotten.

So, he runs—or rather saunters easily along—his flower-strewn course ; accepts the blessings that Fate in the person of his wonder-child drops into his lap ; accepts them as the tardy reward of his virtue, the compensation for his long-suffering ; and so dies at last in the patriarchal style, in an odour of sanctity, and is buried under a tribute of blind love and misguided devotion.

Some of the great Micawber's more eccentric foibles were borrowed from the personality of a queer literary gent., named Thomas Powell, whom

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Dickens met in America, and many of whose strange idiosyncrasies were described at some length in the *Boston Index* some years ago. He also was a man with a large family. He also could be embarrassingly confidential on the smallest possible provocation. He also had a mania for writing letters in the flamboyant style; it is said that he would write them to people who were staying in the same hotel, the same house, and even in the same room with him. But Mr. Powell does not matter much, I think. The fact stands that essentially Micawber was deliberately and consciously founded on John Dickens by the one man who knew him best and least, his son.

"The longer I live the better man I think him," said Dickens toward the end of his career, speaking of his father; and at scattered intervals throughout his life he bore testimony to the affectionate esteem in which he held his father's memory, thus :

I know my father to be as kind-hearted and generous a man as ever lived in the world. Everything that I can remember of his conduct to his wife or children or friends, in sickness or affliction, is beyond all praise. By me, as a sick child, he has watched night and day, unweariedly and patiently, many nights and days. He never undertook any business, charge, or trust, that he did not zealously, conscientiously, punctually, honour-

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ably discharge. His industry has always been untiring. He was proud of me in his way, and had a great admiration of my comic singing. But, in the ease of his temper, and the straitness of his means, he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard, whatever. So I degenerated into cleaning his boots of a morning, and my own ; and making myself useful in the work of the little house ; and looking after my younger brothers and sisters (we were now six in all) and going on such poor errands as arose out of our poor way of living.

That is in serious, these in lighter, vein :

If you should have an opportunity, pendent lite, as my father would observe—indeed did on some memorable ancient occasions when he informed me that the ban-dogs would shortly have him at bay. . . .

There has arrived a characteristic letter for Kate from my father. He dates it Manchester, and says he has reason to believe that he will be in town with the pheasants, on or about the first of October. He has been with Fanny in the Isle of Man for nearly two months ; finding there, as he goes on to observe, troops of friends, and every description of Continental luxury at a cheap rate. . . .

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I have a letter from my father lamenting the fine weather, invoking congenial tempests, and informing me that it will not be possible for him to stay more than another year in Devonshire, as he must then proceed to Paris to consolidate Augustus's French. . . .

Describing the departure from Genoa of an English physician and acquaintance, he says :

We are very sorry to lose the benefit of his advice—or, as my father would say, to be deprived, to a certain extent, of the concomitant advantages, whatever they may be, resulting from his medical skill, such as it is, and his professional attendance, in so far as it may be so considered.

In the same way also it delighted Dickens to recall that it was of one of his connections that his father wrote this truly wonderful sentence :

And I must express my tendency to believe that his longevity is (to say the least of it) extremely problematical.

It was to another connection, who had been insisting somewhat obtrusively on dissenting and nonconformist superiorities, that he addressed the following :

The Supreme Being must be an entirely different



MRS JOHN DICKENS

"Mrs Nickleby"

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individual from what I have every reason to believe him to be, if he would care in the least for the society of your relations.

Comic, indeed ! Quite in the style, apart from its flashes of humour, of the most banal pomposities of " that pot of flat porter," Doctor Johnson ! But did not Dickens graft similar whimsicalities on to some of his most abandoned scoundrels ?

And the wife of this unconscious humorist, whose oddities made you laugh until the tears came, distorting your vision, irradiating his outlines until they became a mere blur of brightness : what of Mrs. Dickens, Charles Dickens' mother, upon whom it is said that Mrs. Nickleby, the foolish, vain, and flighty, frivolous and garrulous and more than slightly selfish Mrs. Nickleby is founded ? Dickens' only direct reference to his mother is in relation to his emancipation from the slavery of the blacking-factory.

My father said I should go back no more, and should go to school. I do not write resentfully or angrily, for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am ; but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.

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In this brief allusion is matter for consideration, indeed! First in Dickens' own frank acknowledgment of the debt that his successful career owed to his early experiences of hardship and poverty and suffering; and again in the revelation it affords of the sort of woman his mother was.

Now there is extraordinarily little known of the elder Mrs. Dickens. The many books written around her son contain only the most cursory mention of her name. But this fierce, bitter reference to her (for Dickens' natural protest of fealty may be ignored: he doth protest too much) throws a vivid sidelight on her character. It explains a strange deficiency in all Dickens' books: a deficiency in the sense that whereas most men recall throughout their lives a feeling of intense love and duty and gratitude toward their mothers' memory, Dickens' work is strikingly free from any expression, definite or implied, of this feeling. There is not a real mother in all his crowded gallery of immortal figures; David Copperfield's mother is just an inane, pretty-pretty abstraction, and that is all. With two exceptions, in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Barnaby Rudge*, his heroes have all been bereft of their mothers in their infancy. The mother of Barnaby Rudge is a mere melodramatic figure. Remains, then, Mrs. Nickleby, who—we have the author's own word for it—was his own mother in disguise: an empty-headed, foolish, vain gossip whom her children

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have to humour and coax at every turn with the patient, long-suffering kindness that one shows toward a naughty, intractable child. But we have seen the kind of father Dickens had : a very poor kind ; yet Dickens loved him dearly, proving that he did not want in filial affection. May it not be, then, since he was habitually so reticent about his mother, and betrays in his writings so poor a sense of the inestimable blessing of a good mother, that he was unfortunate in this parent ; and that to the lack of a wise and worthy mother's influence is due one of the most serious defects in his mental equipment : a defect that manifests itself in his alternately maudlin or cheapening or flippant treatment of the whole sex ?

The mother of a great man is always important. Her character cannot fail to have a vital effect on the character of her son. One might suggest, then, perhaps, that Dickens' always slightly contemptuous attitude toward the things he had not taken the trouble to understand was in fact an hereditary trait directly derived from his mother. The idea is put forward diffidently, but in all seriousness, as a possible explanation of Dickens' more obvious inconsistencies and limitations.

" I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am," says Dickens.

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And there is a certain note of poignancy in that utterance, a certain abrupt trenchancy and depth of feeling, a warrant of acute perception, an evidence of profound philosophy, which Dickens is generally artist enough to keep out of his published work. You might read Dickens from end to end, as one reads idle tales, and never discover that he was a philosopher at all. Many have. Many do. There are some who deny him the possession of any cohesive philosophy; because, forsooth, he is not as one of those inferior flashy tradesmen who put all their wares in the window and keep nothing in the shop.

But . . . there can be no philosophy without suffering; and equally is it true that no one who has suffered and lived and come through can be other than a philosopher. To suggest, as some do, that Dickens, from first to last, maintained (as he did) his divinely sane standpoint toward all things of life and death and the Great Beyond by a series of gorgeous flukes: this is merely to foam at the mouth.

Thomas Carlyle could foam a little, at times; but he was, after all, a keen judge of men, and after Dickens' death he wrote, in a letter of condolence to his nearest and dearest:

"It is almost thirty years since my acquaintance with him began; and on my side, I may say, every new meeting ripened it into more and more

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clear discernment of his rare and great worth as a brother man: a most cordial, sincere, clear-sighted, quietly decisive, just, and loving man: till at length he had grown to such a recognition with me as I have rarely had for any man of my time. This I can tell you three, for it is true and will be welcome to you: to others less concerned I had as soon not speak on such a subject." To one other less concerned he wrote: "I am profoundly sorry for *you*, and indeed for myself, and for us all. It is an event world-wide; a *unique* of talents suddenly extinct; and has eclipsed, we two may say, 'the harmless gaiety of nations.' No death since 1866 has fallen on me with such a stroke. No literary man's hitherto ever did. The good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens—every inch of him an honest man."

I am a little impatient of that last flourish. "An Honest Man" savours somewhat of condescension. It is beside the mark, too, as it affects the public side of Dickens. Dickens was honest, of course. But he was not blatantly, indecently honest: nor did he flaunt his honesty in the face of his reader, as I think Thackeray, for instance, did sometimes. Dickens was not given to any overt form of self-revelation. Indeed there was never an author of his calibre who so persistently and consistently hid himself behind his characters as Dickens did. With the result that there are already almost as

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many versions of the man Dickens as there are people who remember him in the flesh. I have talked with some of his contemporaries and have been amazed at the diversity of their varying impressions of his personality. In a few more decades I predict that he will be as much a mystery as Edgar Allan Poe. In a century or so he will have grown into the proportions of a myth. In two or three hundred years it may be abundantly proved that not only he, but George Eliot and Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë also, were George Henry Lewes.

But, seriously speaking, all this points, I think, to the truth that Dickens was essentially a self-contained and self-sufficient man. Underneath all that bubbling effervescence of his perennial youth, his high spirits and his gay insouciance, there was all the time the grave, sad, moody man who peers forth at us from those later portraits of him that photography has made the most familiar to us. And these innate powers of stern reserve and self-restraint which were never broken down in his moments of freest expansion, were fostered in him in his childhood: in that wonderful childhood which he never quite outgrew: that childhood of precocious knowledge and wise innocence, of incongruous kinship with the poor inarticulate victims of social injustice, of whom he too was one, in the dark days of his servitude.

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"I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am."

Father, mother, the blacking-factory, the drudgery, the Marshalsea, the squalid lodgings and mean makeshifts, the uncouth companions and grotesque associates of his tender infancy : Mrs. Pipchin, who was really Mrs. Roylance, the lady of Little College Street who took children in to board, Charles among them ; Captain Porter, whom we have already glimpsed ; and Mealy Potatoes, Bob Fagin in the flesh, his chum and champion at Warren's, of whom he writes in *David Copperfield* :

Mick Waller . . . informed me that our principal associate would be another boy whom he introduced by the—to me—extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes. I discovered, however, that this youth had not been christened by that name, but that it had been bestowed upon him in the warehouse, on account of his complexion, which was pale or mealy. Mealy's father was a waterman, who had the additional distinction of being a fireman, and was engaged as such at one of the large theatres ; where some young relation of Mealy's—I think his little sister—did Imps in the Pantomimes.

Of all that queer group there is only one who seems to have been in any sense a congenial com-

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panion for little Charles. That one notable exception was his sister Fanny. Of his other brothers and sisters we know curiously little; but some shadowy likeness of Fanny Dickens has been preserved, it is said, in the figure of Fanny Dorrit, a vain, pretty, wilful, spoilt darling—first of misfortune, and then of fortune. Fanny Dickens seems to have been in some sort a fellow-spirit. In Dickens' later youth she seems to have been keenly interested in his theatrical ambitions, and to have aided and abetted his attempts to go upon the stage as an actor. Charles had written to Barclay, who was stage manager at Covent Garden, telling him with the exquisite effrontery of youth how old he was, and exactly what he thought he could do: how that he believed he had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power of reproducing in his own person what he observed in others. There must have been something in his letter that impressed the authorities, for they wrote to him with an appointment, suggesting that he should do something of Mathews'. "My sister Fanny was in the secret (he writes) and was to go with me to play the songs." But when the day of trial came he was laid up with a terrible bad cold and inflammation of the face; and so somehow that particular ambition subsided.

But the incident is significant as suggesting that Fanny Dickens had some glimmerings of

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what I must call, for lack of a better phrase, the artistic temperament.

Whilst he was still engaged at his drudgery at the blacking-factory, she had been elected as a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music ; and he has told what a stab to his heart it was, thinking of his own disregarded condition, to see her go away to begin her education, amid the tearful good wishes of everybody in the house.

A year or two later she won one of the prizes offered to the Academy pupils. Charles, still at his drudgery, went to see her receive the prize, and writes thus of his emotions at witnessing this event : "I could not bear to think of myself—beyond the reach of all such honourable emulation and success. The tears ran down my face. I felt as if my heart were rent. I prayed, when I went to bed that night, to be lifted out of the humiliation and neglect in which I was. I never had suffered so much before. There was no envy in this."

"There was little need that he should say so," is Forster's comment. "Extreme enjoyment in witnessing the exercise of her talents, the utmost pride in every success obtained by them, he manifested always to a degree otherwise quite unusual with him."

Soon afterward she married that Mr. Henry Burnett whom Dickens so strangely idealised; and with her marriage her serious career as an artist

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may be said to have come to an end. Ultimately her health began to break down, and an inevitable tragedy was foreshadowed. "There seems to be no doubt whatever that Fanny is in a consumption," wrote Dickens in 1846. She had broken down in an attempt to sing at a party in Manchester; and subsequent examination by a doctor revealed the sad cause. In 1848 she died; and her death opened the floodgates of reminiscence in her bereaved brother's heart.

He recalled fondly how he and she had been used to wander at night, as children, in a grim old churchyard near their house, looking up at the stars, and talking in awed whispers about them. Something of the fancies that their childish imagination wove about the splendours of that glittering host, under cover of the stillness and the dark, Dickens afterward embodied in his "Child's Dream of a Star."

This chapter may appropriately conclude, I think, with a morsel of the dainty fabric of that tale, since it seems to me that therein is expressed, more frankly than anywhere else in Dickens' work, something of the wistfulness and vain longing that transformed the barren wilderness in which he lived as a child into a fairy playground.

There was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal, and thought of a number of things.

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He had a sister, who was a child too, and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of God who made the lovely world.

They used to say to one another, sometimes, Supposing all the children upon earth were to die, would the flowers, and the water, and the sky be sorry. For, said they, the buds are the children of the flowers, and the little playful streams that gambol down the hillsides are the children of the water; and the smallest bright specks playing at hide and seek in the sky all night, must surely be the children of the stars; and they would all be grieved to see their playmates, the children of men, no more.

There was one clear shining star that used to come out in the sky before the rest, near the church spire, above the graves. It was larger and more beautiful, they thought, than all the others, and every night they watched for it, standing hand in hand at a window. Whoever saw it first cried out, "I see the star!" And often they cried out both together, knowing so well when it would rise, and where. So they grew to be such friends with it, that, before lying down in their beds, they always looked out once again, to bid it good-night; and

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when they were turning round to sleep they used to say, " God bless the star ! "

The sister of the story went to live in that star whilst she was yet a child. The sister of flesh and blood lived in it all her life, I think.

CHAPTER THE NINTH
ADVENTURES IN HISTORY

CHAPTER NINE OF ADVENTURES IN HISTORY

MR. GILBERT CHESTERTON, WHO IS sometimes more dazzling than illuminative, says of the least known of Dickens' books: "It is called *A Child's History of England*, but the child is the writer and not the reader." Here, it seems to me, Mr. Chesterton speaks truth; but it is not the truth about Charles Dickens: it is the truth about Gilbert Chesterton. Only once did Dickens consciously and deliberately adopt the attitude of the average adult toward children, and that was when he wrote the *Child's History*. At all other times he is the immortal child whose genius makes children of all of us altogether. At all other times he is the inspired boy telling fairy tales to the grown-ups. His *Child's History* was in some sort a fairy tale also; but with this difference that it is not inspired. It was indeed a labour of love, and the labour is very apparent; in all Dickens' other works—and they are every one of them labours of love—it is the love and not the labour that vivifies them. But Mr. Chesterton, being himself a child, refuses to be taken in by grandfather's top-hat, frock-coat, and spectacles, even when worn by a grandfather. He knows the trick of that himself. He has often practised it himself, with huge success. He is in the position of a conjuror watching the sleight of hand of

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another conjuror. "You can't deceive me, Mr. Dickens," he says, not realising that it is always unnecessary to deceive those who are only too eager to deceive themselves.

In *A Child's History of England* Dickens for a time puts aside the child and definitely assumes the man. That this is so Mr. Chesterton, having made his point, admits when he says :

A collection of the works of Dickens would be incomplete in an essential as well as a literal sense without his *Child's History of England*. It may not be important as a contribution to history, but it is important as a contribution to biography ; as a contribution to the character and the career of the man who wrote it, a typical man of his time. That he had made no personal historical researches, that he had no special historical learning, that he had not had, in truth, even anything that could be called a good education, all this accentuates not the merit but at least the importance of the book. For here we may read in plain popular language, written by a man whose genius for popular exposition has never been surpassed among men, a brief account of the origin and meaning of England as it seemed to the average Englishman of that age.

But the average Englishman of any age is never a child.



THE CHILDREN OF CHARLES DICKENS
WITH "GRIP" THE RAVEN

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Writing of another of Dickens' adventures in history, Mr. Chesterton is, however, irrefutably right when he says :

He wrote a book about two cities, one of which he understood ; the other he did not understand. And his description of the city he did not know is almost better than his description of the city he did know. This is the entrance of the unquestionable thing about Dickens: the thing called genius; the thing which everyone has to talk about directly and distinctly because no one knows what it is. . . . His actual ignorance of France went with amazing intuitive perception of the truth about it. It is here that he has most clearly the plain mark of the man of genius ; that he can understand what he does not understand.

Dickens was inspired to the study of the French Revolution and to the writing of a romance about it by the example and influence of Carlyle. . . . Carlyle had read a great deal about the French Revolution. Dickens had read nothing at all, except Carlyle. Carlyle was a man who collected his ideas by the careful collation of documents and the verification of references. Dickens was a man who collected his ideas from loose hints in the streets, and those always the same streets; as I have said, he was a citizen of one city. Carlyle was in his way learned ; Dickens was in every way ignorant. Dickens was an Englishman cut

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off from France; Carlyle was a Scotsman historically connected with France. And yet, when all this is said and certified, Dickens is more right than Carlyle. Dickens' French Revolution is probably more like the real French Revolution than Carlyle's.

"It is difficult (Mr. Chesterton goes on), if not impossible, to state the grounds of this strong conviction." It is so difficult, if not impossible, that I am glad to be able to quote Mr. Chesterton in this connection, though at the same time sorry that I have been forestalled in expressing a precisely identical view.

Dickens was so bountifully endowed with the true historic sense—that sense which visualises the public and divines the private life of a nation at each phase of its development—that it seems a pity he should have made his *History* a history for children written by a man, instead of a history for men written by a child. There never has been an author more jealous for the dignity of his art than Dickens. And yet, because his art was so purely instinctive, because he was so truly inspired, because (in short) he was a genius who achieved his effects as it were by a series of gorgeous flukes, Dickens mistrusted his highest powers when he was tempted to match them against the Powers That Be in a new field of enterprise. Like all men who are uneasily conscious of gaps

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and lesions in their armour of learning he hesitated to use his mighty weapons against the feeble weapons of those whose armour appeared sound. He did not realise that, once he had knocked these antagonists down, their armour would prevent them from ever getting up again without assistance.

In writing *Pickwick Papers*, *Barnaby Rudge*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, he seems to have been wholly unaware that he was writing history; and having no misgivings born of any more serious purpose than a desire to achieve certain picturesque effects, he succeeded, where the accredited historians had failed, in giving an air of absolute authenticity to his description of peoples and periods that he had no first-hand knowledge of and had never studied academically.

As I have said elsewhere, *Pickwick Papers* is in many respects the greatest of Dickens' novels, a quite unique masterpiece : unique if only in its blending together of the finest qualities of both the picaresque romance and the novel of manners; in the evidences of unexampled high spirits that irradiate its pages; in its inexhaustible vivacity and stupendous comic force; its nimble wit and inimitable drollery; its prodigality of invention in incident and character; but, above all, in its fidelity to truth, which makes it perhaps the best mirror of an age—an era—extant in any lan-

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guage, the value of which, to history alone, is incalculable. In its portrayal of the manners and customs, the speech and opinions and everyday doings of the period and the people with which it deals, it is beyond question or cavil one of the most remarkable achievements in English literature.

It is all this, and yet it has to do with an epoch that had almost passed away when Dickens was quite a young man. But (it will be objected) he could remember it all. And that is so: he could remember it all—but only because he was a genius, only because he remained a child all his life. The average man, you and I: what do we remember of the scenes and incidents, the companions and the experiences, of our childhood? We remember many things, many people, that never were or ever could be in this world. The mists of time have distorted our vision so that, looking back, we see nothing aright. Many of us still think of our schoolmasters as men about nine feet high. Our growth has been so gradual that we do not seem to have grown at all. Thus we have lost our sense of proportion, which is only another name for that quality which makes one man in a million great, and the lack of which causes ninety-nine out of every hundred millions to misunderstand the great man. It is our lack of that sense which blinds us to the glory of Dickens' achievement in re-creating the environment

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and the atmosphere of the days of his childhood, as he did in every one of his books, but most notably in the most carelessly written of them all, *Pickwick Papers*.

Dickens would have been much surprised, as perhaps the reader is surprised, if you had told him that in writing *Pickwick Papers* he was writing history. He would have replied that the book was a purely imaginative account of the imaginary doings and sayings of imaginary people. And he would have been both right and wrong. He would have been right in so far as the actual adventures and adventurers were spun out of the stuff of his dreams ; but he would have been wrong in the implication that they were any less real than sheer realities. They were more real than any realities, because they were more probable, and because they gave form and unity to a whole world : they expressed a world in miniature.

Isolated scenes and characters, incidents and utterances, though they be literal transcripts from life, are never so true to life as typical things and happenings. You will find more typical John Bulls among the cab-drivers of Paris than throughout the length and breadth of England, which is not to say, however, that John Bull is a typical Frenchman : John Bull still remains a truer type of the Englishman than any individual English farmer.

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And in the same way, though you search London, you shall not find a Cockney who is half such a Cockney as Sam Weller . . . who never existed, but who yet remains and will forever remain the typical Cockney.

Dickens, in *Pickwick Papers*, created a *milieu* and set a group of puppets in the midst of it that were more eloquent of the life and times of the early nineteenth century than any collection of real men and women in any real surroundings could possibly have been. In that way he made history dance to his piping; in that way he clothed its dry bones with flesh and blood and breathed into it the breath of life and made of it a living thing. He discovered, by happy accident, that history, after all, should not be mainly a matter of dates and a record of the lives of kings and other exceptional people, but a survey of the gradual evolution of a nation from its primitive beginnings to its apogee. For just as a man is not to be known by his official biography, as set forth in the usual reference books, but by his home life, so it is with a nation. After a day spent in a cottage on the slopes of Plinlimmon, you will know far more about the Welsh than after many years spent in the British Museum.

In *Pickwick Papers* Dickens wrote history—but without knowing it—because he wrote about the commonplaces of everyday existence : those commonplaces which are more momentous than

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any wars and more significant than any changes of dynasty. In *Barnaby Rudge* and in *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens wrote history—still without knowing it—because he wrote about the little people who make history and not about the big people who are made or marred by it.

If you set the real Lord George Gordon against the figmentary Simon Tappertit, and Dennis the hangman beside Hugh of the Maypole, and Foulon beside the Defarges, you will find the figments rather more alive than the realities, but all alike are stamped with the unmistakable hall-mark of the Dickens mintage. There *was* a poor unfortunate lunatic named Lord George Gordon, there *was* a hangman named Dennis, and there *was* a real Foulon. These people were born and lived and died. But there was never a Simon Tappertit or a Maypole Hugh or a Monsieur or Madame Defarge: that is to say, there were never any persons bearing those names, perhaps; but certainly there were countless hordes wearing their bodies, thinking with their brains, suffering as they suffered, feeling as they felt, moved by the same heart-stirrings. And when the scholiasts, like vultures, had done picking at their dead flesh, leaving only the dry skeletons; and when the skeletons, having been articulated by the pedants, had crumbled into dust, then it was the turn of genius, it was the heaven-appointed function of genius, to re-animate that dust.

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In an American edition of *A Tale of Two Cities* there is an editorial note in which it is said that "one book for which Dickens is reputed to have had a special liking, and of which he never tired, was Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*, and while working on the *Tale of Two Cities* he asked Carlyle if he might see one of the works referred to in the *History*, whereupon Carlyle packed up and sent down to Gadshill all his reference volumes, and Dickens read them faithfully and to profitable use." Did he? I find no warrant for the statement. It is probable that Dickens read *The French Revolution* pretty thoroughly. We know that he did at least dip into Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, and it is very likely that he read a good deal of Rousseau. But beyond those limits (I feel pretty sure) his study of the period did not extend. For the rest he relied on his natural powers of entering into and visualising the life of any people at any period. And why not? If he had set himself to write *The Last Days of Pompeii* I have every reason to believe that it would have been a far better romance than Bulwer Lytton's.

Those of Dickens' Adventures in History which should, however, intrigue us most are concerned with his presentment of certain authentic historical figures, with Sir John Chester, who was obviously founded on Lord Chesterfield, with

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Lord George Gordon, with Dennis, and in a lesser degree, Foulon. Grip the raven, Stryver, and Sydney Carton may also, for convenience' sake, I think be allowed to come within the scope of this chapter.

It has been said that Sydney Carton was founded on another purely imaginary character, Richard Wardour, the hero of Wilkie Collins' play, *The Frozen Deep*, in which Dickens acted with his friends and his children during the summer of 1857. Life is short, of making many books there is no end, and so I have never read *The Frozen Deep*. Nevertheless I scout the suggestion that Dickens could ever have been indebted to any other writer—or indeed anybody—for any least part of his material. That the notion for the book came to him whilst he was engaged in these amateur theatricals Dickens himself admits, and there was afterwards found this note in his manuscript book: "How as to a story in two periods—with a lapse of time between, like a French Drama? Titles for such a notion." Follows a long list of titles. Then "The drunken?—dissipated?—What?—LION—and his JACKAL and Primer, stealing down to him at unwonted hours." And then, foreshadowing Jerry Cruncher and his wife: "A man, and his wife—or daughter—or niece. The man, a reprobate and ruffian; the woman (or girl) with good in her, and with compunctions. He believes nothing, and defies everything; yet

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has suspicions always that she is praying against his evil schemes, and making them go wrong. He is very much opposed to this, and is always angrily harping on it. 'If she *must* pray, why can't she pray in their favour, instead of going against 'em? She's always ruining me—she always is—and calls that Duty! There's a religious person! Calls it Duty to fly in my face! Calls it Duty to go sneaking against me!'

It is enough. One has only to bring these rumours into the light of day to find that they crumble into just a little dirt upon our hands.

Of Stryver, who is described as "a man of little more than thirty but looking twenty years older than he was, stout, loud, red, bluff, and free of any drawback of delicacy . . . (he) had a pushing way of shouldering himself (morally and physically) into companies and conversations, that argued well for his shouldering his way up in life;" of the prototype of Stryver Mr. Edmund Yates affirms that he was drawn from a Mr. Edwin James, a well-known legal functionary in his time. Says Mr. Yates: "One day I took Dickens—who had never seen Edwin James—to a consultation. Mr. James laid himself out to be specially agreeable; Dickens was quietly observant. About four months after appeared the early numbers of *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which a prominent part was played by Mr. Stryver. After reading the description I said to Dickens: 'Stry-

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ver is a good likeness!' He smiled. 'Not bad, I think,' he said, 'especially after only one sitting.'"

Between Mr. Stryver with his rusty robes and lurid face, and Grip the raven with his rusty plumage and lurid beak, I seem to discern a grotesque likeness. Of Grip Dickens writes in his *Preface to Barnaby Rudge*:

The late Mr. Waterton having, some time ago, expressed his opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offered the few following words about my experience of these birds.

The raven in this story is a compound of two great originals, of whom I was at different times the proud possessor. The first was in the bloom of his youth when he was discovered in a modest retirement in London by a friend of mine, and given to me. He had from the first, as Sir Hugh Evans says of Anne Page, "good gifts," which he improved by study and attention in a most exemplary manner. He slept in a stable—generally on horseback—and so terrified a Newfoundland dog by his preternatural sagacity, that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius, to walk off unmolested with the dog's dinner from before his face. He was rapidly rising in acquirements and virtues when in an evil hour his stable was newly painted. He observed

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the workmen closely, saw that they were careful of the paint, and immediately burned to possess it. On their going to dinner he ate up all they had left behind, consisting of a pound or two of white lead ; and this youthful indiscretion terminated in death.

While I was yet inconsolable for his loss, another friend of mine in Yorkshire discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village public-house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a consideration, and sent up to me. The first act of this sage was to administer to the effects of his predecessor by disinterring all the cheese and halfpence he had buried in the garden—a work of immense labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind. When he had achieved his task, he applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept that he would perch outside my window and drive imaginary horses with great skill, all day. Perhaps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master sent his duty with him, “and if I wished the bird to come out very strong, would I be so good as to show him a drunken man”—which I never did, having (unfortunately) none but sober people at hand. But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulating influences of this sight might have been. He had not the least respect, I am sorry to say, for me in return, or for

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anybody but the cook, to whom he was attached—but only, I fear, as a Policeman might have been. Once I met him unexpectedly, about a mile from my house, walking down the middle of a public street, attended by a pretty large crowd, and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His gravity under these trying circumstances I can never forget, nor the extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he defended himself behind a pump, until overpowered by numbers. It may have been that he was too bright a genius to live long, or it may have been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill, and thence into his maw—which is not improbable, seeing that he new-pointed the greater part of the garden-wall by digging out the mortar, broke countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the frames, and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a wooden staircase of six steps and a landing—but after some three years he too was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eyes to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over on his back with a sepulchral cry of “Cuckoo!” Since then I have been ravenless.

In *Barnaby Rudge*, Lord George Gordon, and in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Foulon, are drawn directly from life. Let us contrast Carlyle's pre-

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sentment of Foulon with that of Dickens'. First, Carlyle:

This is that same Foulon named *âme damnée du Parlement*; a man grown grey in treachery, in griping, projecting, intriguing, and iniquity: who once when it was objected, to some finance scheme of his, "What will the people do?"—made answer, in the fire of discussion, "The people may eat grass:" hasty words, which fly abroad irrevocable,—and will send back tidings. . . . As for old Foulon, one learns that he is dead; at least "a sumptuous funeral" is going on; the undertakers honouring him, if no other will . . . but . . . hardly above a week since the Bastille fell . . . it suddenly appears that old Foulon is alive; nay, that he is here, in early morning, in the streets of Paris: the extortioner, the plotter, who would make the people eat grass, and was a liar from the beginning!—It is even so. The deceptive "sumptuous funeral" (of some domestic that died); the hiding-place at Vitry toward Fontainebleau, have not availed that wretched old man. Some living domestic or dependant, for none loves Foulon, has betrayed him to the Village. Merciless boors of Vitry unearth him; pounce on him, like hell-hounds: Westward, old Infamy; to Paris, to be judged at the Hotel-de-Ville! His old head, which seventy-four years have bleached, is bare; they have tied an emblematic bundle

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of grass on his back ; a garland of nettles and thistles round his neck : in this manner ; led with ropes ; goaded on with curses and menaces must he, with his old limbs, sprawl forward ; the pitiablest, most unpitied of all old men.

Sooty Saint-Antoine, and every street, musters its crowd as he passes ;—the Hall of the Hotel-de-Ville, the Place de Grève itself, will hardly hold his escort and him. Foulon must not only be judged righteously, but judged there where he stands, without any delay. Appoint seven judges, ye Municipals, or seventy-and-seven ; name them yourselves, or we will name them : but judge him ! . . . “ Friends,” said “ a person in good clothes,” stepping forward , “ what is the use of judging this man ? Has he not been judged these thirty years ? ” With wild yells, Sansculottism clutches him in its hundred hands : he is whirled across the Place de Grève, to the *Lanterne*, Lamp-iron which there is at the corner of the *Rue de la Vannerie* ; pleading bitterly for life—to the deaf winds. Only with the third rope (for two ropes break, and the quivering voice still pleaded) can he be so much as got hanged ! His Body is dragged through the streets ; his Head goes aloft on a pike, the mouth filled with grass : amid sounds as of Tophet, from a grass-eating people.

And now, Dickens, thus :

The men were terrible in the bloody-minded

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anger with which they looked from windows, caught up what arms they had, and came pouring down into the streets ; but, the women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their bare poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions. Villain Foulon taken, my sister! Old Foulon taken, my brother! Miscreant Foulon taken, my daughter! Then, a score of others ran into the midst of these, beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming, Foulon alive! Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass! Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him! Foulon who told my baby that it might suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want! Oh, mother of God, this Foulon! Oh, Heaven, our suffering! Hear me, my dead baby and my withered father: I swear on my knees, on these stones, to avenge you on Foulon! Husbands and brothers and young men, Give us the blood of Foulon, Give us the head of Foulon, Give us the heart of Foulon, Give us the body and soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon in pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him! With these cries, numbers of the women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirled about, striking



PHILIP DORMER STANHOPE, EARL OF CHESTERFIELD

"Sir John Chester"

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and tearing at their own friends until they dropped in a passionate swoon, and were only saved by the men belonging to them from being trampled under foot.

They march to the Hotel de Ville, where the prisoner is on trial, and there wait impatiently, "during two or three hours of drawl and the winnowing of many bushels of words," until

at length the sun rose so high that it struck a kindly ray, as of hope or protection, directly down upon the old prisoner's head. The favour was too much to bear ; in an instant the barrier of dust and chaff, that had stood surprisingly long, went to the winds, and Saint Antoine had got him !

It was known directly, to the furthest confines of the crowd. Defarge had but sprung over a railing and a table, and folded the miserable wretch in a deadly embrace—Madame Defarge had but followed and turned her hand in one of the ropes with which he was tied—The Vengeance and Jacques Three were not yet up with them, and the men at the windows had not yet swooped into the hall, like birds of prey from their high perches—when the cry seemed to go up, all over the city, "Bring him out ! Bring him to the lamp !"

Down, and up, and head foremost on the steps of the building ; now on his knees ; now on his feet ; now on his back ; dragged, and struck at,

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and stifled by the bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands ; torn, bruised, panting, bleeding, yet always entreating and beseeching for mercy ; now, full of vehement agony of action, with a small clear space about him as the people drew one another back that they might see ; now, a log of dead wood drawn through a forest of legs ; he was hauled to the nearest street-corner where one of the fatal lamps swung, and there Madame Defarge let him go—as a cat might have done to a mouse—and silently and composedly looked at him while they made ready and while he besought her : the women passionately screeching at him all the time, and the men sternly calling out to have him killed with grass in his mouth. Once he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him, shrieking ; twice he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him, shrieking ; then the rope was merciful and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.

Carlyle had dredged for his facts in all the seven seas of literature that had been poured forth on the subject of the French Revolution. He had culled his knowledge of Foulon and the rest from a hundred abstruse and recondite sources. Dickens had read . . . only Carlyle, some fragments of De Mercier, and perhaps Rousseau. Yet his

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pictures of that wild time are as full and complete and vivid in their truth as if he had steeped himself in contemporary lore.

Carlyle may indeed be said to have introduced the Spirit of the French Revolution to the English people ; but it was Dickens who raised its body from the dead.

“ No account of the Gordon Riots has been to my knowledge introduced into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale,” says Dickens in his *Preface to Barnaby Rudge*.

Of his description of the Riots Forster says, very justly and aptly :

There are few things more masterly in any of his books. From the first low mutterings of the storm to its last terrible explosion, the frantic outbreak of popular ignorance and rage is depicted with unabated power. The aimlessness of idle mischief by which the ranks of the rioters are swelled at the beginning ; the recklessness induced by the monstrous impunity allowed to the early excesses ; the sudden spread of drunken guilt into every haunt of poverty, ignorance, or mischief in the wicked old city, in which such rich materials of crime lie festering ; the wild action of its poison on all, without scheme or plan of any

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kind, who come within its reach; the horrors that are more bewildering for so complete an absence of purpose in them; and, when all is done, the misery found to have been self-inflicted in every cranny and corner of London, as if a plague had swept over the streets; these are features in the picture of an actual occurrence, to which the manner of the treatment gives extraordinary force and meaning.

“Mr. Dennis the hangman (he adds) is a portrait that Hogarth would have painted with the same wholesome severity of satire employed upon it in *Barnaby Rudge*.” From which it would appear that Forster did not know, none of Dickens’ commentators seem to know, that there was indeed a real Dennis, a hangman of Newgate, who was executed for his share in the Riots of 1780.

Of the unwitting instigator of those riots, Lord George Gordon, Dickens gives this impression which may be compared with the actual portrait of that poor misguided maniac:

The lord, the great personage, who did the May-pole so much honour, was about the middle height, of a slender make, and sallow complexion, with an aquiline nose, and long hair of a reddish brown, combed perfectly straight and smooth about his ears, and slightly powdered, but without the faintest vestige of a curl. He was attired, under his

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greatcoat, in a full suit of black, quite free from any ornament, and of the most precise and sober cut. The gravity of his dress, together with a certain lankness of cheek and stiffness of deportment, added nearly ten years to his age, but his figure was that of one not yet past thirty. As he stood musing in the red glow of the fire, it was striking to observe his very bright large eye, which betrayed a restlessness of thought and purpose, singularly at variance with the studied composure and sobriety of his mien, and with his quaint and sad apparel. It had nothing harsh or cruel in its expression; neither had his face, which was thin and mild, and wore an air of melancholy; but it was suggestive of an air of indefinable uneasiness, which infected those who looked upon him, and filled them with a kind of pity for the man: though why it did so, they would have been at some trouble to explain.

A formal biography of the real Lord George Gordon is set forth in *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, thus :

He was born in London, 26th December, 1751, the third son of the third Duke of Gordon. From Eton he entered the Navy, and rose to be lieutenant, but quitted the service during the American War, after a dispute with the Admiralty. Elected in 1774 M.P. for the pocket borough of Ludgers-

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hall, Wiltshire, he presently attacked both sides with such freedom as to give rise to the saying that there "were three parties in parliament—the ministry, the opposition, and Lord George Gordon." Still he displayed considerable talent in debate, and no deficiency of wit or argument. A bill having, in 1778, passed the legislature for the relief of Roman Catholics from certain penalties and disabilities, the Protestant Association of London was, among other societies, formed for the purpose of procuring its repeal, and in November 1779 Lord George was elected its president. On 2nd June, 1780, he headed a vast and excited mob of 50,000 persons, who, decked with blue cockades, marched in procession from St. George's Fields to the House of Commons to present a petition for the repeal of the measure. Dreadful riots ensued in the metropolis, lasting five days, in the course of which many Catholic chapels and private dwelling-houses, Newgate prison, and the mansion of the chief-justice, Lord Mansfield, were destroyed. The magistrates feared to read the Riot Act, but at length, on the 7th, when thirty-six fires were blazing at once, the troops were called out by the king, and everywhere drove the rioters before them, 210 being killed, 248 wounded, and 135 arrested, of whom 21 were afterwards executed. Property to the amount of 180,000 pounds had been destroyed in the riots. . . . Lord George himself was tried for

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high treason ; but Erskine's defence got him off on the ground of absence of treasonable design. His subsequent conduct seemed that of a person of unsound mind. Having, in 1786, refused to come forward as a witness in a court of law, he was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury for contempt. In 1787 he was convicted, on two official informations, for a pamphlet reflecting on the laws and criminal justice of the country, and for publishing a libel on Marie Antoinette and the French Ambassador in London. To evade sentence he retired to Holland, but was sent back to England, and apprehended at Birmingham. He died in Newgate of fever, 1st November 1793, having latterly become a proselyte to Judaism.

In 1795 there was a *Life of Lord George Gordon* published. It was written by one Dr. Robert Watson, and some vindication of the hapless peer's character was attempted in the work. It does not seem likely that Dickens ever read this book ; but certainly his own kindly treatment of Lord George has long since superseded the more elaborate apologia.

To my mind there is something almost eerie in the power that Dickens displays in limning this extraordinary figure of history. In his *Preface* he goes out of his way to declare that

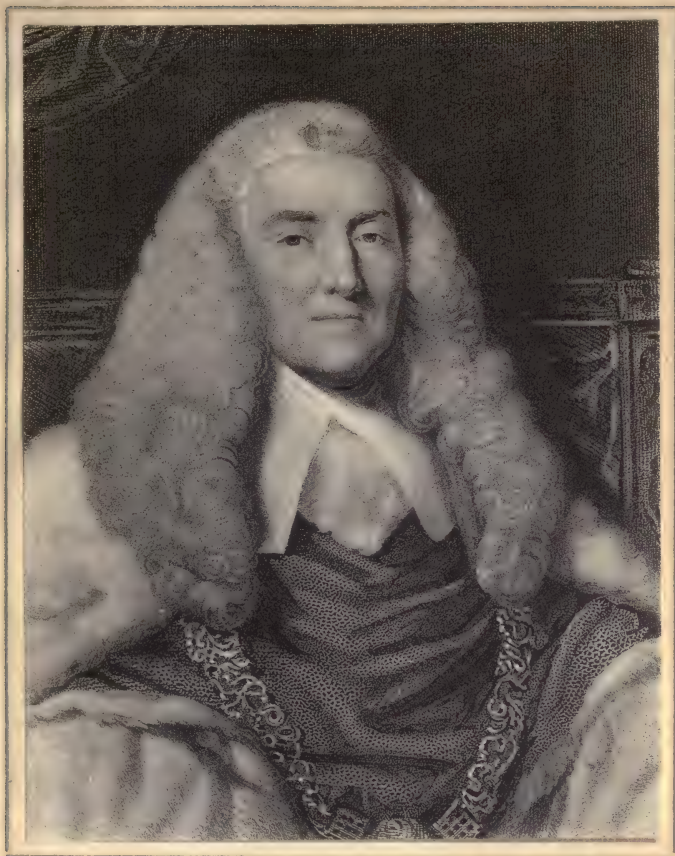
It is unnecessary to say that those shameful tu-

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mults, while they reflect indelible disgrace upon the time in which they occurred, and all who had act or part in them, teach a good lesson. That what we falsely call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion, and who in their daily practice set at naught the commonest principles of right and wrong ; that it is begotten of intolerance and persecution ; that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate, and unmerciful, all History teaches us. But perhaps we do not know it in our hearts too well, to profit by even so humble an example as the "No Popery" riots of 1780. However imperfectly these disturbances are set forth in the following pages, they are impartially painted by one who has no sympathy with the Romish Church, though he acknowledges, as most men do, some esteemed friends among the followers of its creed.

I don't like that concluding sentence: it savours of pragmatism; but I do like, I do admire, and I do marvel at the boundless sympathy which could embrace and understand and condone the strange self-sacrificial madness of a poor deluded fanatic.

It would have been so fatally easy, you would think, for Dickens to perpetrate the most ghastly blunders in his treatment of Lord George Gordon. If, in my cynical youth, I had not already read *Barnaby Rudge*, and yet happened to know its theme, I believe I should have hesitated to read



LORD MANSFIELD

Barnaby Rudge



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it. I should have been afraid of coming across yet another repetition in another guise of that offence which, in *Pickwick Papers* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, has caused so much pain to countless thousands of splendid Puritans and for ever alienated them from Dickens. I should have dreaded to find him making hay of the most sacred and solemn convictions of more than half the population of Europe. A Father Melchizedec Howler, or a Monsignor Stiggins, would have been such an outrage upon an ancient, stately, and dignified faith as might have shattered even my fealty toward the greatest English novelist of any age. Stiggins and Howler and Chadband : all these, being new and raw, were fair butts for derision and ridicule ; but a Roman Catholic priest . . . ! I need have had no fears, however. I should have no fears now. Dickens is sometimes a little coarse and even gross, but he is never—in spite of all the New Criticisms—vulgar. His sense of humour fails him over and over again, most lamentably, but never his sense of decency. He is often fierce and furious, wild and whirling ; but never hysterical. He is often loud, but never lewd ; often trite, but never banal. So, when he came to grips with this silly infatuate peer, and had to handle a type of mind with which his own essentially healthy mind could not possibly have anything whatever in common, it is his innate, indomitable sanity, it is his immutable perception

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of the eternal fitness of things, that saves him, that does more than save him, that uplifts him to the level of the martyr on the cross and lends him divine insight into the meaning of those supernal dreams for the sake of which countless millions have poured out their blood like water to the glory, not so much of their gods, as of their own god-like souls.

History would try to persuade me that the secretary of Lord George Gordon was not such a man as Gashford; that he was a man of probity and courage and intellect, a sort of sublimation of John Grueby, Lord George's sturdy henchman, of whom we have all too little in *Barnaby Rudge*. But this I steadfastly refuse to believe. I believe in Dickens' Gashford, tall

. . . angularly made, high-shouldered, bony, and ungraceful. His dress, in imitation of his superior, was demure and staid in the extreme; his manner formal and constrained. This gentleman had an overhanging brow, great hands and feet and ears, and a pair of eyes that seemed to have made an unnatural retreat into his head, and to have dug themselves a cave to hide in. His manner was smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking. He wore the aspect of a man who was always lying in wait for something that *wouldn't* come to pass; but he looked patient—very patient—and fawned like a spaniel dog.

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Even now, while he rubbed and warmed his hands before the blaze, he had the air of one who only presumed to enjoy it in his degree as a commoner ; and though he knew his lord was not regarding him, he looked into his face from time to time, and with a meek and deferential manner, smiled as if for practice.

That, or something akin to it, is the type that does invariably attach itself to the poor profligate and spendthrift, whoever he may be, and whether he be prodigal of his money, or of his manhood, of his faith, or of his unfaith. Gashford is a living symbol of the evil genius that waits upon the generous weakness of all good men who have anything to lose. It is the slimy cunning of the Gashfords of this world that exploits the folly and the goodness of simpler, nobler natures, turns their potential beneficence into active mischief, covers their innocence with shame, and corrupts their purity. Dickens never evinced a nicer appreciation or a more acute perception of the sort of combinations that do usually go to the making of colossal ruin and disaster than in this striking juxtaposition of Gashford with Lord George. History denies the truth of this presentment of the secretary. That only proves that these Gashfords, as well as being consummate rascals, are consummate hypocrites also. It is History that has been deceived, not Dickens.

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Remains to be considered the figure of Sir John Chester, who is, transparently, Lord Chesterfield.

He was a staid, grave, placid gentleman, something past the prime of life, yet upright in his carriage for all that, and slim as a greyhound. He was well mounted upon a sturdy chestnut cob, and had the graceful seat of an experienced horseman; while his riding gear, though free from such fopperies as were then in vogue, was handsome and well chosen. He wore a riding-coat of a somewhat brighter green than might have been expected to suit the taste of a gentleman of his years, with a short black velvet cape, and laced pocket-holes and cuffs, all of a jaunty fashion; his linen too was of the finest kind, worked in a rich pattern at the wrists and throat, and scrupulously white. Although he seemed, judging from the mud he had picked up on the way, to have come from London, his horse was as smooth and cool as his own iron-grey periwig and pigtail. Neither man nor beast had turned a single hair; and saving for his soiled skirts and spatterdashes, this gentleman with his blooming face, white teeth, exactly-ordered dress, and perfect calmness, might have come from making an elaborate and leisurely toilet, to sit for an equestrian portrait at old John Willet's gate.

In the privacy of his apartments in the Temple

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he muses upon the graces and the virtues of his famous prototype.

"My Lord Chesterfield," he said . . . "if I could but have profited by your genius soon enough to have formed my son on the model you have left to all wise fathers, both he and I would have been rich men. Shakespeare was undoubtedly very fine in his way; Milton good, though prosy; Lord Bacon, deep, and decidedly knowing; but the writer who should be his country's pride is my Lord Chesterfield. . . .

"I thought I was tolerably accomplished as a man of the world," he continued, "I flattered myself that I was pretty well versed in all those little arts and graces which distinguish men of the world from boors and peasants, and separate their character from those intensely vulgar sentiments which are called the national character. Apart from any natural prepossession in my own favour, I believed I was. Still, in every page of this enlightened writer, I find some captivating hypocrisy which has never occurred to me before, or some superlative piece of selfishness to which I was utterly a stranger. I should quite blush for myself before this stupendous creature, if, remembering his precepts, one might blush at anything. An amazing man! a nobleman indeed! any King or Queen may make a Lord, but only

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the Devil himself—and the Graces—can make a Chesterfield.”

Men (adds Dickens in a bitter commentary) who are thoroughly false and hollow, seldom try to hide these vices from themselves ; and yet, in the very act of avowing them, they lay claim to the virtues they feign most to despise. “ For,” say they, “ this is honesty, this is truth. All mankind are like us, but they have not the candour to avow it.” The more they affect to deny the existence of any sincerity in the world, the more they would be thought to possess it in its boldest shape ; and this is an unconscious compliment to Truth on the part of these philosophers which will turn the laugh against them to the Day of Judgment.

There is something here of that narrow-minded intolerance which is very characteristic of a certain type of demagogue all the world over. And Dickens belonged to that type. He had all the average demagogue's cocksureness and impatience of what he does not understand, together with the good-humoured disdain born of self-complacency that commonly accompanies it and vents itself in vigorous ridicule. Yet he does succeed in getting Sir John Chester down on paper, and the philosophy of the elegant man of fashion, cynic, and wit is as appropriate to a certain modern type as it was, in a way, to its first exponent,

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Lord Chesterfield, on whom Sir John Chester is reputedly founded.

But . . . Dickens is so obsessed by a melodramatic convention that he draws Lord Chesterfield—or Sir John Chester—as an extremely handsome and debonair gentleman, ignoring the fact (if he ever knew it) that the real Lord Chesterfield, in spite of his courtly accomplishments, was of unimposing presence and rather distinctly plain-looking, a man whose career was uniformly mediocre, and whose ambitions were gratified neither by success in public life nor in court society. He was, according to his contemporaries, an enlightened statesman, an orator, a conspicuous wit, and a man of almost universal talents; and yet he is only remembered as the author of the famous letters written to his natural son, Philip Stanhope. Son of the third Earl of Chesterfield, he studied at Cambridge, made the grand tour, and sat in the House of Commons as member for Saint Germans in Cornwall from 1716 to 1726, when he succeeded his father as fourth earl. In 1730 he was made Lord Steward of the Household. Until then, as a Whig, he had supported Walpole; but being ousted from office for voting against an excise bill, he went over to the opposition, and was one of Walpole's bitterest antagonists. He was above bribes, and, according to his lights, an honest statesman and a true patriot. He joined the Pelham Ministry in

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1744 ; in 1745-6 was a judicious, able, and conciliatory Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland ; and was in 1746 one of the principal Secretaries of State, but in 1748 was compelled by ill-health and deafness to retire from public life. During the brief period of his political power he was on terms of some intimacy with Pope, Swift, and Bolingbroke, and he patronised Colley Cibber and many other men of letters. He died, a lonely, neglected, forgotten old man, in 1773.

But it was of course to be expected that Dickens, knowing nothing of the class to which Lord Chesterfield belonged, and being utterly incapable of appreciating the aristocratic point of view, should have been taken in by Lord Chesterfield's pose, should have accepted him at his own valuation, and confounded the purely artificial writer with the natural man. But that he did catch the tone of his *Letters* I think may be established by the following medley of original and parody :

Men who converse only with women are frivolous, effeminate puppies ; and those who never converse with them are bears.

The world is a lively place enough, in which we must accommodate ourselves to circumstances, sail with the stream as glibly as we can, be content to take froth for substance, the surface for the depth, the counterfeit for the real coin. I wonder



LORD GEORGE GORDON

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that no philosopher has ever established that our globe itself is hollow. It should be, if Nature is consistent in her works.

Dissimulation to a certain degree is as necessary in business as clothes are in the common intercourse of life ; and a man would be as imprudent who should exhibit his inside naked, as he would be indecent if he produced his outside so.

All men are fortune-hunters, are they not ? The law, the church, the court, the camp—see how they are all crowded with fortune-hunters, jostling each other in the pursuit. The Stock Exchange, the pulpit, the counting-house, the royal drawing-room, the senate—what but fortune-hunters are they filled with ?

Advice is seldom welcome ; and those who want it the most always like it the least.

CHAPTER THE TENTH
CRIMINAL PROTOTYPES

CHAPTER THE TENTH CRIMINAL PROTOTYPES

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT HAS SAID somewhere that he never realised there was anything picturesque about the Five Towns until he read an impression of them in one of Mr. George Moore's novels. And Mr. J. M. Barrie was astonished to find that anybody could be interested in his native place, Kirriemuir. In these confessions both these authors are merely restating one of those elusive truths that only artists seem to be able to lay firm hold upon. A lover cannot tell you what his sweetheart is like so that you would recognise her in the street. He could as easily describe his boots or his mother. The things with which we are most familiar are always the hardest to describe. The things we know best—the things we cherish and believe in—our more intimate hopes and fears and doubts—the emotions we hold most sacred—the strongest passions that actuate us—none of these can we translate quite adequately into words. There would seem to be an undiscovered language. It is perhaps the language that all artists spend their lives in learning, and die without mastering.

The other day I was arguing with a friend about Mr. Harry Lauder. I had read, or been told, that he was born in Lancashire. And my friend, a Scotsman, said that that was manifestly impossible. Only a Scotsman (said he) could

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sing Scotch songs as Mr. Lauder sings them. I asked, then, why Mr. Lauder had started his career by singing Irish songs? And from that I got to considering why it was that a man has to get away from a thing in order to see it properly, as it actually is, in due proportion and perspective. Mr. Lauder may or may not have been born in Scotland. But of one thing I am sure, which is that, in either case, he spent some years of his childhood or youth in Scotland, that he then left Scotland, and then, returning to it, saw Scotsmen for the first time as they really are. If he had lived in Scotland all his life he never would have been able to impersonate Scotsmen as he does. Many a Cockney can give an excellent imitation of a yokel; but never a Cockney could impersonate a Cockney on the stage. The only good stage Cockney I have ever seen, Mr. Albert Chevalier, is half a Frenchman and half a Welshman, I believe. And as in the art of acting, so it is in the art of writing. It is not until you have got out of the environment in which you were born that you can depict that environment convincingly.

Dickens, in his two first books, *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, writes of people and incidents that had only come casually and superficially within his own experience, if at all. What did he know of country-house life? of leisurely travelling in England? of sport? He knew a great deal about country inns, stage-coaches

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and stage-coach-drivers and inn-keepers and waiters and ostlers and so on, and about Parliamentary elections, and the processes of the law, and lawyers and lawyers' clerks and all that entourage; he knew of these things because he had come fresh to the study of them in his impressionable youth or early manhood. He was familiar with, and he could describe, a debtors' prison. But, he had not got sufficiently far away from the Marshalsea to be able to describe that. So, he elected to describe the Fleet Prison, which he did not know very intimately, rather than the Marshalsea, which he did know very intimately indeed.

And in *Oliver Twist*, though he knew no more than the average man about criminals and workhouses, we find him choosing his chief characters from among the criminal classes and from among the inmates of a workhouse.

It was not until he was fairly launched on his third book, *Nicholas Nickleby*, that he began to deal faithfully with the kind of people he had been brought up amongst; and by that time his fame and prosperity had lifted him high enough out of his original environment to enable him to perceive its artistic possibilities. In the Kenwigs group he gives us his first full-length portraits of the kind of grotesques whom we most commonly think of nowadays as Dickensy types.

Bill Sikes, the Artful Dodger, and Fagin are

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all lay-figures: mere dummies that Dickens somehow contrives to galvanise into horrible life. I have said before that there never was a professional burglar who remotely resembled Bill Sikes. And never was there an expert pickpocket who remotely resembled the Artful Dodger. A pickpocket who wore a suit of clothes several sizes too large for him, with long sleeves clumsily turned up at the cuffs so that they must have hampered the free movement of his hands, and whose whole appearance was conspicuous and suspicious, never did or could or would attain to any proficiency in his nefarious calling. Thieves of all kinds have to look, if possible, more honest than honest men if they are to achieve any success. They must be, in all outward seeming, so ordinary as never to attract a second glance from any one; least of all the policeman.

And Fagin the fence . . . ?

Receivers of stolen property are more likely to be found on view behind their counters all the week, and in chapel on Sundays, than in foul dens in evil neighbourhoods. Dickens, in *Oliver Twist*, projected his den of thieves out of his inner consciousness. Obviously he had no first-hand knowledge whatever of any kind of criminal. He knew nothing of their habits or manners or customs. Even their speech he was unfamiliar with, or he would never have made Sikes utter such preposterous oaths as "Wolves tear your

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throats!" He had got his details all wrong; and yet had got his effects so marvellously right, somehow, that his very blunders are more convincing than all the meticulous accuracies of the modern realist.

Fagin was, I think, founded on the personality of a famous rogue named Ikey Solomons; and as no other Dickens commentator seems to have discovered the identity of this gentleman I propose to quote Major Arthur Griffiths—sometime Governor of Newgate Prison—concerning his career.

At no period (says Major Griffiths¹) could thieves in London or elsewhere have prospered had they been unable to dispose of their ill-gotten goods. The trade of fence or receiver, therefore, is very nearly as old as the crimes which it so obviously fostered. One of the most notorious, and for a time most successful practitioners in this illicit trade, passed through Newgate in 1831. The name of Ikey Solomons was long remembered by thief and thief-taker. He began as an itinerant street vendor at eight, at ten he passed bad money, at fourteen he was a pickpocket and a "duffer," or a seller of sham goods. He early saw the profits to be made out of purchasing stolen goods, but could not embark in it at first

¹ *Chronicles of Newgate.*

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for want of capital. He was taken up when still in his teens for stealing a pocket-book, and was sentenced to transportation, but did not get beyond the hulks at Chatham. On his release an uncle, a slop-seller in Chatham, gave him a situation as "barker," or salesman, at which he realised £150 within a couple of years. With this capital he returned to London and set up as a fence. He had such great aptitude for business and such a thorough knowledge of the real value of goods, that he was soon admitted to be one of the best judges known of all kinds of property, from a glass bottle to a five hundred guinea chronometer. But he never paid more than a fixed price for all articles of the same class, whatever their intrinsic value. Thus a watch was paid for as a watch, whether it was of gold or silver; a piece of linen as such, whether the stuff was coarse or fine. This rule of dealing with stolen goods continues to this day, and has made the fortune of many since Ikey.

Solomons also established a system of provincial agency, by which stolen goods were passed on from London to the seaports, and so abroad. Jewels were re-set, diamonds re-faced; all marks by which other articles might be identified, the selvages of linen, the stamps on shoes, the numbers and names on watches, were carefully removed or obliterated after the goods passed out of his hands. On one occasion the

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whole of the proceeds of a robbery from a boot-shop was traced to Solomons ; the owner came with the police, and was morally convinced that it was his property, but could not positively identify it, and Ikey defied them to remove a single shoe. In the end the injured bootmaker agreed to buy back his stolen stock at the price Solomons had paid for it, and it cost him about a hundred pounds to re-stock his shop with his own goods.

As a general rule Ikey Solomons confined his purchases to small articles, mostly of jewellery and plate, which he kept concealed in a hiding-place with a trap-door just under his bed. He lived in Rosemary Lane, and sometimes had as much as £20,000 worth of goods secreted on the premises. When his trade was busiest he set up a second establishment, at the head of which, although he was married, he put another lady, with whom he was on intimate terms. The second house was in Lower Queen Street, Islington, and he used it for some time as a *depôt* for valuables. But it was eventually discovered by Mrs. Solomons, a very jealous wife, and this, with the danger arising from an extensive robbery of watches in Cheapside, in which Ikey was implicated as a receiver, led him to think seriously of trying his fortunes in another land. He was about to emigrate to New South Wales, when he was arrested at Islington and committed to New-

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gate on a charge of receiving stolen goods. While thus incarcerated he managed to escape from custody, but not actually from gaol, by an ingenious contrivance which is worth mentioning. He claimed to be admitted to bail, and was taken from Newgate on a writ of *habeas* before one of the judges sitting at Westminster. He was conveyed in a coach driven by a confederate, and under the escort of a couple of turnkeys. Solomons, while waiting to appear in court, persuaded the turnkeys to take him to a public-house where all might "refresh." While there he was joined by his wife and other friends. After a short carouse the prisoner went into Westminster, his case was heard, bail refused, and he was ordered back to Newgate. But he once more persuaded the turnkeys to pause at the public-house, where more liquor was consumed. When the journey was resumed, Mrs. Solomons accompanied her husband in the coach. Half-way to Newgate she was taken with a fit. One turnkey was stupidly drunk, and Ikey persuaded the other, who was not much better, to let the coach change its route to the gaol, and pass Petticoat Lane, where the suffering woman might be handed over to her friends. On stopping at a door in this low street, Ikey jumped out and ran into the house, slamming the door behind him. He passed through and out at the back, and was soon beyond pursuit. By-and-by the turnkeys, sobered by their

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loss, returned to Newgate alone, and pleaded in excuse that they had been drugged.

Ikey left no traces, and the police could hear nothing of him. He had in fact gone out of the country, to Copenhagen, whence he passed on to New York. There he devoted himself to the circulation of forged notes. He was also anxious to do business in watches, and begged his wife to send him over a consignment of cheap "righteous" watches, or such as had been honestly obtained, and not "on the cross." But Mrs. Solomons could not resist the temptation to dabble in stolen goods, and she was found shipping watches of the wrong category to New York. For this she received a sentence of fourteen years' transportation, and was sent to Van Diemen's Land. Ikey joined her at Hobart Town, where they set up a general shop, and soon began to prosper. He was, however, recognised, and ere long an order came out from home for his arrest and transfer to England, which presently followed, and he again found himself an inmate of Newgate, waiting trial as a receiver and a prison-breaker. He was indicted on eight charges, two only of which were substantiated, but on each of them he received a sentence of seven years' transportation. At his own request he was re-conveyed to Hobart Town, where his son had been carrying on the business. Whether Ikey was "assigned" to his own family is not re-

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corded, but no doubt he succeeded to his own property when the term of servitude had expired.

Dickens began *Oliver Twist* in 1838, at a time when the name of Ikey Solomons was no doubt as well-known as that of Charles Peace a generation ago. The likeness between Ikey Solomons and Fagin is not too apparent perhaps; but it happened that at the beginning of the nineteenth century there seems to have been a very plague of Jews engaged in receiving stolen property. There was another Solomons who was not above reproach, and an Abrahams, and Money Moses, a publican, who kept the Black Lion in Vinegar Yard, Drury Lane, where secretly he did business as one of the most daring and successful fences in London. Many of these fences are rumoured to have trained children in crime, not in the preposterous way of Fagin that is presently to be described, but not less efficiently. To quote Major Griffiths again :

A peculiar feature in the criminal records of the early part of the (nineteenth) century was the general increase in juvenile depravity. This was remarked and commented upon by all concerned in the administration of justice; magistrates of all categories, police officers, gaolers, and philanthropists. It was borne out, moreover, by the

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statistics of the times. There were in the various London prisons, in the year 1816, three thousand inmates under twenty years of age. Nearly half of this number were under seventeen, and a thousand of these alone were convicted of felony. Many of those sent to prison were indeed of tender years. Some were barely nine or ten. Children began to steal when they could scarcely crawl. Cases were known of infants of barely six charged in the courts with crimes. This deplorable depravity was attributable to various causes: to the profligacy prevailing in the parish schools; the cruel and culpable neglect of parents who deserted their offspring, leaving them in a state of utter destitution, or were guilty of the no less disgraceful wickedness of using them as instruments for their nefarious designs; the artfulness of astute villains—prototypes of old Fagin—who trained the youthful idea in their own devious ways. The last-named was a fruitful source of juvenile crime. Children were long permitted to commit small thefts with impunity. The offence would have been death to those who used them as catspaws; for them capital punishment was humanely nearly impossible. The education in iniquity continued steadily. They went from bad to worse, and ere long became regular inmates of “flash houses,” where both sexes mixed freely with vicious companions of their own age, and the most daring enjoyed the hero-worship of their

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fellows. When thus assembled, they formed themselves into distinct parties or gangs, each choosing one of their number as captain, and dividing themselves into reliefs to work certain districts, one by day and one by night. When they had "collared their swag," they returned to divide their plunder, having gained sometimes as much as three or four hundred pounds. A list of these horrible dens prepared about this date showed that there were two hundred of them, frequented by six thousand boys and girls, who lived solely by this way, or were the associates of thieves. These haunts were situated in St. Giles, Drury Lane, Chick Lane, Saffron Hill, the Borough, and Ratcliffe Highway. Others that were out of luck crowded the booths of Covent Garden, where all slept promiscuously amongst the rotting garbage of the stalls. During the daytime all were either actively engaged in thieving, or were revelling in low amusements. Gambling was a passion with them, indulged in without let or hindrance in the open streets; and from tossing buttons there they passed on to playing in the low public-houses at such games as "put," or "the rocks of Scylla," "bumble puppy," "tumble tumble," or "nine holes."

These infamies, as a result of recent exposures, were matters of general knowledge at the time when *Oliver Twist* was written. What Dickens



BRYAN WALLER PROCTER



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knew about them he knew in common with most other people. But he knew about them with a difference. He knew about them as the small boy knows about the black void behind the cellar-door. His elders call it the coal-hole. He knows that it is a cave of demons, the very porch of Hell. When his elders open that door only coals come out. But when he opens it—just an inch or two—and peeps in, he sees ghastly, lowering faces, grim and hideous, gibbering at him out of the darkness. He passes that door on tiptoe, and bears it in mind as he goes up to bed, and dreams about it in his sleep. So did Dickens dream of the mean squalor of the criminal haunts whose secrets were daily cast up on the bare bleak shores of the police-office. So did he invest that squalor and its denizens with a quality of picturesque horror that lent them something of the hectic effect of leering, grinning devils in red torment.

Fagin, the arch-devil, though he is limned in in the fewest possible words, stands forth lurid and malignant as the figure of Satan in mediæval pageantry. He appears, like that typical mythical Satan, with his toasting-fork, and the firelight playing over him. For the rest he is just "a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare." Dickens christens him "the old gentleman," "the pleas-

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ant old gentleman," " the merry old gentleman." Old Gentleman is still a euphemism for the devil in the more select lower-class circles.

When the breakfast was cleared away, the merry old gentleman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waist-coat-pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and sticking a mock-diamond pin in his shirt : buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such times he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time the two boys followed him closely about : getting out of his sight so nimbly everytime he turned round that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last the Dodger trod upon his toe, or ran upon his boot accidentally,

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while Charley Bates stumbled up against him behind ; and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle-case. If the old gentleman felt a hand in any one of his pockets he cried out where it was ; and then the game began all over again.

Throughout the book, until the final catastrophe, Fagin is usually presented as this kind of horribly amusing person ; he is like some frowsy, obscene bird that seems to chuckle and mock in a secret language of its own. He shares with the rest of Dickens' really great villains that saving grace of humour, that grace which saves them from utter absurdity, utter unreality. The real Jewfence of Dickens' early days: Ikey Solomons or Money Moses : was probably a pale and colourless creature of a familiar atavistic type : dull-eyed, dull-witted, dull-spirited, slinking, sheepish, sly, and furtive. Fagin, alike in that first moment of his appearance on the lime-lit stage, beating the boys, his victims, about the shoulders with his toasting-fork, and in his last moments of epileptic frenzy in the condemned cell, is consistently theatrical and thrilling. He is always (as actors say) getting the last ounce out of his part. His final outcry is splendidly in keeping with his character, as he laughs aloud in his

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delirium of terror at the sad wistful ghost of Oliver, and exclaims: "Oliver, too, ha! ha! ha! Oliver too—quite the gentleman now—quite the—take that boy away to bed! . . . Take him away to bed!" cried Fagin. "Do you hear me, some of you? He has been the—the—somehow the cause of all this. It's worth the money to bring him up to it—Bolter's throat, Bill; never mind the girl—Bolter's throat as deep as you can cut. Saw his head off!" "Fagin," said the jailer. "That's me!" cried the Jew, falling instantly into the attitude of listening he had assumed upon his trial. "An old man, my lord; a very old, old man!"

Old indeed! Old as the devil. As incredible as the devil. And as immortal!

Dickens' books are full of violent criminals, several murderers among them; but all of them accidental criminals, amateur rather than professional criminals. *Oliver Twist* was his first and last excursus into that genre of the Underworld among the people of the abyss. In *Nicholas Nickleby* notably, but in each succeeding book ever less and less insistently, he clings to the old melodramatic conception of the villain as a person manifestly villainous in every aspect and nuance of his personality . . . until he is inspired to draw a murderer or two from life; and then

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we get a Mademoiselle Hortense and a Julius Slinkton.

Mademoiselle Hortense, lady's maid to Lady Dedlock, is described in *Bleak House* as

a Frenchwoman of two-and-thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles—a large-eyed brown woman with black hair; who would be handsome but for a certain feline mouth, and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager, and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy; and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head, which could be pleasantly dispensed with—especially when she is in an ill-humour and near knives. Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objections so express themselves that she seems to go about like a very neat She-wolf imperfectly tamed. Besides being accomplished in all the knowledge appertaining to her post, she is almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language.

Mademoiselle Hortense was founded on the notorious Mrs. Manning, who, with her husband, suffered the penalty of death at Horsemonger Lane Gaol in 1849.

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The Mannings' victim was

¹a man named Patrick O'Connor, a Custom-House gauger, who had been a suitor of Marie de Roux before she became Mrs. Manning. Marie de Roux up to the time of her marriage had been in service as lady's maid to Lady Blantyre, daughter of the Duchess of Sutherland, and Manning hoped to get some small Government appointment through his wife's interest. He had failed in this as well as in the business of a publican which he had at one time adopted. After the marriage a close intimacy was still maintained between O'Connor and the Mannings. He lived at Mile End, whence he walked often to call at 3 Miniver Place, Bermondsey, the residence of his old love. O'Connor was a man of substance. He had long followed the profitable trade of a money-lender, and by dint of usurious interest on small sums advanced to needy neighbours, had amassed as much as £8000 or £10,000. His wealth was well-known to "Maria," as he called Mrs. Manning, who made several ineffectual attempts to get money out of him. At last this fiendish woman made up her mind to murder O'Connor and appropriate all his possessions. Her husband, to whom she coolly confided her intentions, a heavy brutish fellow, was yet aghast at his wife's resolve, and tried hard to dissuade

¹ *Chronicles of Newgate*, by Major Arthur Griffiths.

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her from her bad purpose. In his confession after sentence he declared that she plied him well with brandy at this period, and that during all the time he was never in his right senses. Meanwhile the woman, unflinching in her cold, bloody determination, carefully laid all her plans for the consummation of the deed.

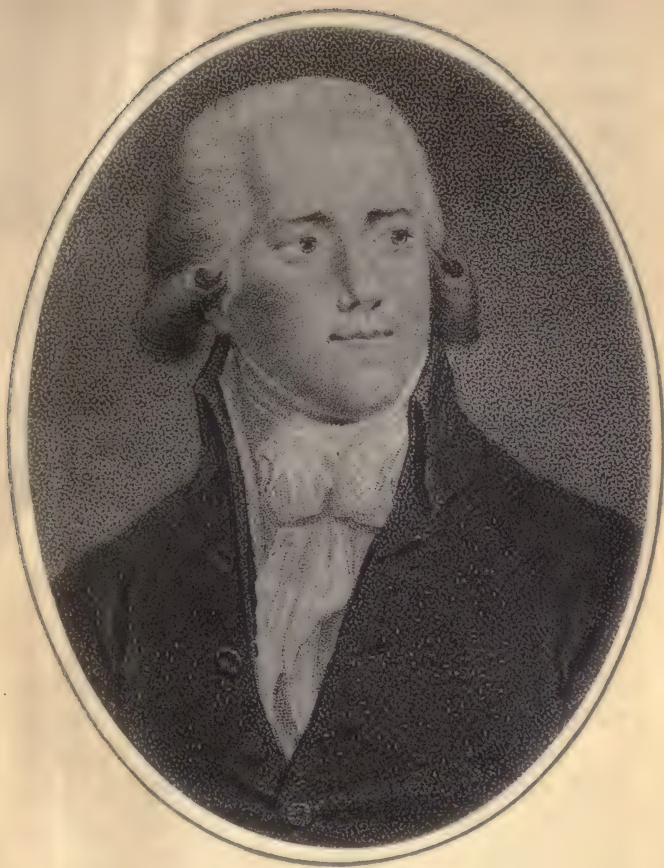
One fine afternoon in August, O'Connor was met walking in the direction of Bermondsey. He was dressed with particular care, as he was to dine at the Mannings' and meet friends, one a young lady. He was seen afterwards smoking and talking with his hosts in their back-parlour and never seen again alive. It came out in the husband's confession that Mrs. Manning induced O'Connor to go down to the kitchen to wash his hands, that she followed him to the basement, that she stood behind him as he stood near the open grave she herself had dug for him, and which he mistook for a drain, and that while he was speaking to her she put the muzzle of a pistol close to the back of his head and shot him down. She ran upstairs, told her husband, made him go down to look at her handiwork, and as O'Connor was not quite dead, Manning gave the *coup de grâce* with a crowbar. After this Mrs. Manning changed her dress and went off in a cab to O'Connor's lodgings, which, having possessed herself of the murdered man's keys, she rifled from end to end. Returning to her own home, where Man-

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ning meanwhile had been calmly smoking and talking to the neighbours over the basement wall, the corpse lying just inside the kitchen all the while, the two set to work to strip the body and hide it under the stones of the floor. This job was not completed till the following day, as the hole had to be enlarged, and the only tool they had was a dust-shovel. A quantity of quicklime was thrown in with the body to destroy all identification. This was on a Thursday evening. For the remainder of that week and part of the next the murderers stayed in the house and occupied the kitchen close to the remains of their victim. On the Sunday Mrs. Manning roasted a goose at this same kitchen fire and ate it with relish in the afternoon. This cold-blooded indifference after the event was only outdone by the premeditation of this horrible murder. The hole must have been excavated and the quicklime purchased quite three weeks before O'Connor met his death, and during that time he must frequently have stood or sat over his own grave.

The murder was discovered. Mr. and Mrs. Manning were arrested.

The prisoners were in due course transferred to Newgate to be put upon their trial at the Central Criminal Court. A great number of distinguished people assembled as usual at the Old Bailey on the day of the trial. The Mannings were ar-



LORD GRENVILLE

Barnaby Rudge

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raigned together : the husband standing at one of the front corners of the dock, his wife at the other end. . . . Mrs. Manning was not without personal charms : her face was comely, she had dark hair and good eyes, and was above the middle height, yet inclined to be stout. She was smartly dressed in a plaid shawl and a white lace cap ; her hair was dressed in long bands. She had lace ruffles at her wrists, and wore primrose-coloured kid gloves. The case rested upon irrefutable evidence, and was proved to the satisfaction of the jury who brought in a verdict of guilty . . . when sentence of death was passed . . . Mrs. Manning, speaking with a foreign accent, addressed the court with great fluency and vehemence. She complained that she had had no justice ; there was no law for her ; she had found no protection either from judges, the prosecutor, or her husband. She had not been treated like a Christian but like a wild beast of the forest. . . . When the judge assumed the black cap Mrs. Manning became still more violent, shouting, " No, no, I will not stand it ! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves ! " and would have left the dock had not Mr. Cope, the governor of Newgate, restrained her. After judgment was passed she repeatedly cried out Shame ! and stretching out her hand she gathered up a quantity of the rue which, following ancient custom, dating from the days of the gaol fever, was strewn in front of the

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dock, and threw it towards the bench with a contemptuous gesture.

On being removed to Newgate from the Court Mrs. Manning became perfectly furious. She uttered loud imprecations, cursing judge, jury, barristers, witnesses, and all who stood around. Her favourite and most often-repeated expression was, "D—n seize you all." They had to handcuff her by force against the most violent resistance, and still she raged and stormed, shaking her clenched and manacled hands in the officers' faces. From Newgate the Mannings were taken in separate cabs to Horsemonger Lane Gaol. On this journey her manner changed completely. She became flippant, joked with the officers, asked how they liked her "resolution" in the dock, and expressed her utmost contempt for her husband, whom she never intended to acknowledge or speak to again. Later her mood changed to abject despair. On reaching the condemned cell she threw herself upon the floor and shrieked in an hysterical agony of tears. After this until the day of execution she recovered her spirits and displayed reckless effrontery, mocking at the chaplain, and turning a deaf ear to the counsels of a benevolent lady who visited her. Now she abused the jury, now called Manning a vagabond, and through all ate heartily at every meal, slept soundly at nights, and talked with cheerfulness on almost any subject. Nevertheless she

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attempted to commit suicide by driving her nails, purposely kept long, into her throat. She was discovered just as she was getting black in the face.

Charles Dickens, who witnessed the execution of the Mannings, wrote to *The Times* saying that he believed that "a sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at the execution this morning could be imagined by no man, and presented by no heathen land under the sun. The horrors of the gibbet, and the crime which brought the wretched murderers to it, faded in my mind before the atrocious bearing, looks and language of the assembled spectators. When I came upon the scene at midnight, the shrillness of the cries and howls that were raised from time to time, denoting that they came from a concourse of boys and girls already assembled in the best places, made my blood run cold."

As a result of this passionate protest public executions were abandoned in England.

The prototype of Julius Slinkton in Dickens' short story *Hunted Down* was Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, essayist, forger, and poisoner, who was born at Chiswick in October, 1794. Left an orphan he was brought up at Turnham Green by his grandfather, Doctor Ralph Griffiths, the

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founder of *The Monthly Review*, and was educated under Charles Burney. He held a commission in the Guards when, about 1820 or earlier, he took to writing tawdry art criticisms and miscellaneous articles for the periodicals, especially the *London Magazine*, under the pseudonym of Janus Weathercock. He married on £200 a year, and soon outrunning his means first committed a forgery, and then poisoned with strychnine his uncle, his mother-in-law, his sister-in-law, and a Norfolk acquaintance at Boulogne. The sister-in-law (Wainewright's wife was an accomplice in her murder) had been fraudulently insured for £18,000, but two actions to enforce payment failed; and Wainewright, venturing back from France to London in 1837, was arrested for his old forgery, and sentenced to life transportation. Even in Newgate he bragged of still holding "the position of a gentleman," and in Van Diemen's Land canted about Art and the Ideal. There he painted portraits, ate opium, and at last died of apoplexy at Hobart Town in 1852. During his early manhood he exhibited frequently at the Royal Academy, and also published one book entitled *Some Passages in the Life of Egomet Bonmot*, besides acting as editor of the *London Magazine* for a time.

Indeed Wainewright did cut something of a figure among the notabilities of his brief day; and does seem to have strangely interested, fav-

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ourably or otherwise, many of his contemporaries. Hazlitt, Lamb, Bryan Waller Procter ("Barry Cornwall"), Lytton, and Dickens all wrote about him. Lytton made him the central figure of his forgotten novel, *Lucretia*, wherein, as Gabriel Varney, he is more or less faithfully mirrored from his childhood up. Lamb seems to have had a real affection for him, refers to him as the kindly, light-hearted Janus, and mentions him as having wept at the false news of Elia's death. But Procter describes him scathingly as "short and fattish, with mincing steps and tremulous words, his hair curled and full of unguents, and his cheeks painted like those of a demirep." And there are passing allusions to this horrible creature in Forster's *Life* which tend to support Procter's view of his character.

Forster and Dickens, in 1838 or 1839, made a circuit of nearly all the London prisons; "and in coming to the prisoners under remand, while going over Newgate, accompanied by Macready (the actor) and Mr. Hablot Browne ('Phiz'), were startled by a sudden tragic cry of 'My God, there's Wainewright!' In the shabby-genteel creature, with sandy, disordered hair and dirty moustache, who had turned quickly round with a defiant stare at our entrance, looking at once mean and fierce, and quite capable of the cowardly murders he had committed, Macready had been horrified to recognise a man familiarly known to

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him in former years, and at whose table he had dined."

We find Dickens' ultimate use of this poor tawdry villain foreshadowed in the following note from his manuscript book : " Devoted to the Destruction of a man. Revenge built up on love. The secretary in the Wainewright case, who had fallen in love (or supposed he had) with the murdered girl. . . . The man with his hair parted straight up the front of his head, like an aggravating gravel-walk. Always presenting it to you. ' Up here, if you please. Neither to the right or left. Take me exactly in this direction. Straight up here. Come off the grass.' "

In *Hunted Down* this same character is presented as a man of " about forty or so, dark, exceedingly well dressed in black—being in mourning—and the hand he extended with a polite air had a particularly well-fitting black kid glove upon it. His hair, which was elaborately brushed and oiled, was parted straight up the middle; and he presented this parting to the clerk, exactly (to my thinking) as if he said in so many words : ' You must take me, if you please, my friend, just as I show myself. Come straight up here, follow the gravel path, keep off the grass, I allow no trespassing.' "

Hunted Down does not matter much, in a literary sense. It is, I think, the only real pot-boiler Dickens ever wrote, a very poor story, utterly

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unworthy of its author ; but I cite it in this connection as an apt illustration of the difference between Dickens' earliest and latest methods of dealing with criminal types. Julius Slinkton is so very much more probable than Fagin or Quilp or Jonas Chuzzlewit—and so infinitely less convincing.



SAMUEL CARTER HALL

"Pecksniff"



CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH
THE GREAT GROTESQUES



CHAPTER ELEVENTH THE GREAT GROTESQUES

IT SEEMS A PITY THAT MOST OF Dickens' characters should have had no recognisable prototypes in real life; or, if they had prototypes, that so little should be known about them, and that that little should be so vague and unsatisfactory. It seems all the more a pity because there is often plentiful information about many of his minor characters; and the sum of that information is increasing almost daily. In every issue of *The Dickensian*, and in every new review of Dickens' life and work, there is generally to be found an item or so dealing with the newly-discovered prototypes of this or that figure from one or other of his novels, or touching on some fresh fact concerning the old accepted prototypes.

Thus it is that writing a book about Dickens is like writing an encyclopædia. As soon as you think that you have definitely and finally settled some matter relating to him some new development of that matter crops up, and you find that you are out of date almost before the ink has dried on the paper. Dickens, like Shakespeare, is inexhaustible. The more you write or think about him the more there is to think and write about. Which is merely to say, perhaps, that he is like life itself.

And just here the New Criticism gets its hackles

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up. "Like life!" says the New Criticism. "There is nothing so unlike life as Dickens. His people are preposterous. His incidents are incredible. His pathos is a thing of gulps and snuffles like a cold in the head. And his humour . . . his humour is no laughing matter."

But I have taken New Critics to see the late Dan Leno. And they have laughed at him consumedly. They did not know that Dan Leno was just a character—not always the same character—out of Dickens. He was a preposterous person, if you like. The incidents he described were usually incredible. His voice was one of the most pathetic voices I have ever heard: hoarse and plaintive; and his humour was so far from being a laughing matter (to him) that he gave it forth in a series of moans and sobs. I have seen Mr. Bransby Williams in his impersonations of Dickens characters, and though I respect and admire his sincere conscientiousness and his obviously deep feeling for Dickens I have never seen anything less like any character out of Dickens than Mr. Williams' interpretation of Dickens characters. I have seen Miss Lee as Poor Jo, and Mr. Charles Wilmot as Chadband. I have seen Sir Herbert Tree and his company in *Oliver Twist*; I have seen Mr. Martin Harvey as Sydney Carton in *The Only Way*, and Mr. Cyril Maude as Sairey Gamp. And they have all been hope-

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lessly out of the picture. But Mr. Dan Leno . . . I feel, somehow, that if Dickens had only lived long enough he would have been bound in the inevitable nature of things to create "Mrs. Kelly," and The Proprietor of The Nineteenth Century Stores, and The Shopwalker, and the Leader of The Midnight March. For these preposterous people that Dan Leno put upon the stage in his own person, and the incredible tales that he told about them ; these people with their sad humour and their humorous pathos: these were in the very vein of Dickens. And one had only to glance round the house at the audience, to see their laughing faces and to hear the thunder of their mirth, to discover the secret of Dickens' popularity.

The fact is that when any man says of literature or art that it presents a false picture of life he is talking like a fool, not a nice silly fool, but a conceited fool. He is arrogating to himself all wisdom and all knowledge. He is claiming to have plumbed and scaled all the depths and heights of human nature. And obviously he has to be very young or very ignorant, or both, to advance such a gigantic claim. Older, wiser folk know that, in a manner of speaking, there are as many different worlds as there are people in the world. Things exist, not in themselves, but in the eyes of the beholder. To all true women all

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babies are beautiful, and to everybody else they are ugly. The tragedy of the young man in the new pair of trousers who is going to meet his sweetheart, and who slips upon a piece of orange-peel and sits down in a puddle, is the onlookers' comedy. One man's humour is another man's boredom, and a third man's exasperation. We cannot all laugh at the same thing; we must laugh at one another, or, better still, at ourselves. Dickens taught us to laugh at the whole human race, villains and ourselves included; and those of us who don't—who can't or won't—laugh with us, must expect to have the laughter turned against them. There is nothing that so infuriates the average man as the dolt who cannot see his jokes. And the average man is quite right. He who never sees a joke never sees anything; and he who never sees anything denies that anything is there.

Dickens in himself provides the finest answer to the critics who say that what does not seem true to them must of necessity be false. Dickens was a supreme type of the average man. He was the average man grown to the proportions of a giant. There never was any individual average man in the least like Dickens; and yet Dickens expresses all average men. And in the same way—and this is the point I would make—he expresses all sorts of average people by investing them with his own proportions, by drawing them

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to his own scale, and so sublimating them that they become supreme types also.

The original of Mrs. Gamp was in reality a person hired by a most distinguished friend of Dickens, a lady, to take charge of an invalid very dear to her ; and the common habit of this nurse in the sick-room, among other Gampish peculiarities, was to rub her nose along the top of the tall fender. From that trick of rubbing her nose along the top of the fender Dickens built up one of his most colossal figures.

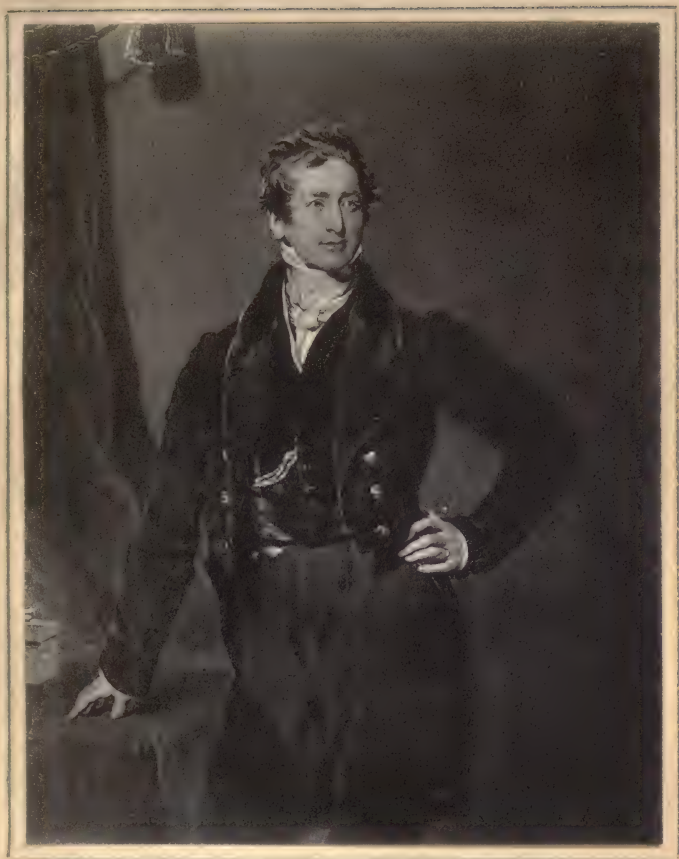
“Mrs. Gamp (says Dickens in his Preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit*) was, four-and-twenty years ago, a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness. The Hospitals of London were, in many respects, noble Institutions ; in others, very defective. I think it not the least among the instances of their mismanagement that Mrs. Betsy Prig was a fair specimen of a Hospital Nurse.”

That is Dickens in judicial mood, when his transports have died down, and the morning has turned a cold eye upon the visions of the night. But Dickens in that mood is seldom convincing. Hitherto we have had no doubts whatever as to the reality of Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig ; but now we have an uneasy conviction that we should *not* find a Sairey Gamp at any lying-in or laying-out, or a Betsy Prig in any of the hospitals, though we searched London through. If we made

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that search, however, I think, at the end of it, we should bring home with us an impression of dozens of different hospital nurses that formed a sort of composite portrait of Betsy Prig ; and we should bring home with us impressions of dozens of private nurses that, in bulk and being subtly blent together, were somehow quite adequately expressed in the personality of Mrs. Gamp.

The chief fault of the modern realist is that he whittles away all eccentricities to get at the normal type, instead of adding eccentricity to eccentricity. He forgets that it is by a man's eccentricities that we remember him and recognise him again ; and that as the vast majority of men have some eccentricity or other, that man cannot possibly be normal who has none. We believe in Dickens' great grotesques because they are so compact of eccentricities which remind us of the eccentricities of our friends and acquaintances. There were, in Dickens' day, fat nurses, nurses with pimply faces, nurses with red and swollen noses, nurses who smelt of spirits, nurses who carried pattens, who carried a species of gig umbrella, who had a husky voice, who had a moist eye, who had a remarkable power of turning up that eye and showing only the white of it, nurses with the strange idioms and turns of speech that Mrs. Gamp affected. And though it is extremely unlikely that you would have found any one nurse with all these peculiarities, it is



SIR ROBERT PEEL.

A possible original of "Pecksniff."

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extremely likely that among them you would have found them all.

In this way—in the way, I mean, by which he achieved his effects—Dickens was a better realist than Zola. In France I have met many men and women who reminded me irresistibly at first sight of people in Zola's books; but very soon I found that they all possessed some distinctive quality or idiosyncrasy that made them quite different. Of course; for there are no two of us alike. The majority of Thomas Hardy's peasants might conceivably change minds with one another, and no one, not even themselves, be any the wiser; but the peasants of Dorsetshire could not change minds with one another without going mad. You could not say this of the characters of Meredith, who was a contemporary and a disciple of Dickens. Sir Willoughby Patterne would be laughed out of Society; yet I find it easier to believe in him than in all Mr. John Galsworthy's Men of Property who somehow refuse to sort themselves out in my mind, who lurk in the background of my memory like shadows, like the rows of people I never get a chance to talk to in a crowded drawing-room, and whose salient features are as hard for me to remember as their names, which I have never heard.

Side by side with Mrs. Gamp, in the book called *Martin Chuzzlewit*, there is the hardly less strik-

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ing figure of Pecksniff. By some (Forster among them) Pecksniff is said to have been founded on Sir Robert Peel ; by others, on Samuel Carter Hall, who is best remembered as the husband of Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall. Mr. Hall, author and editor, was the fourth son of Colonel Robert Hall. He was born at Geneva Barracks, County Waterford, 9th May 1800. Coming to London from Ireland in 1822, he studied law, and became a gallery reporter for the *New Times*. He established *The Amulet* in 1825, an annual which he edited for several years ; succeeded the poet Campbell as editor of the *New Monthly Magazine* ; was sub-editor of the *John Bull* ; and did other journalistic work before he founded and edited the *Art Journal* in 1839, which has done so much to create a public for art. He was a pertinacious and indefatigable worker and skilful compiler, the joint works written and edited by Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall exceeding five hundred volumes. A testimonial of £1600 was presented to him by friends in 1874, and in 1880 he received a civil list pension of £150 a year. He died 16th March 1889. He went to lecture in the United States at one period of his life, and was invidiously heralded by some American papers as "the original of Pecksniff." "Having heard the novelist speak of this writer (says Mr. Fitzgerald) I might be inclined to think the theory is not so far-fetched."

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As to Sir Robert Peel we only know that Dickens' description of Pecksniff, though bearing some resemblance to the outward appearance of the statesman, is not much like any description of him that his contemporaries have preserved. Pecksniff was

a most exemplary man : fuller of virtuous precepts than a copy-book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place and never goes there: these were his enemies; the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie, for he fastened it behind) and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace, a holy calm pervades me." So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-grey, which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eyeglass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, "Behold the moral Pecksniff!"

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But

Sir Robert Peel (says Mr. Justin M'Carthy in *A History of Our Own Times*), the leader of the opposition (in 1837), was by far the most powerful man in the House of Commons. Added to his great qualities as an administrator and a Parliamentary debater, he had the virtue, then very rare among Conservatives, of being a sound and clear financier, with a good grasp of the fundamental principles of political economy. His high austere character made him respected by opponents as well as by friends. His temperament was cold, or at least its heat was self-contained ; he threw out no genial glow to those around him. He was by nature a reserved and shy man, in whose manners shyness took the form of pompousness and coldness. Something might be said of him like that which Richter said of Schiller : he was to strangers stony and like a precipice from which it was their instinct to spring back. It is certain that he had warm and generous feelings, but his very sensitiveness only led him to disguise them. The contrast between his emotions and his lack of demonstrativeness created in him a constant artificiality which often seemed mere awkwardness.

No ; the more closely we compare Sir Robert Peel with Pecksniff the more fantastic seems the theory that there was any but a superficial resemblance between them.

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The notion of taking Pecksniff for a type of character (says Forster, writing of *Martin Chuzzlewit*) was really the origin of the book ; the design being to show, more or less by every person introduced, the number and variety of humours and vices that have their root in selfishness.

And never was any purpose more supremely consummated. The Americans need not have been so indignant against Dickens for what they stigmatised as his gross libels upon them and their country.

They had no Pecksniff, at any rate. Bred in a more poisonousswamp than their Eden, of greatly older standing and much harder to be drained, Pecksniff was all our own. The confession is not encouraging to national pride, but this character is so far English that though our countrymen as a rule are by no means Pecksniffs, the ruling weakness is to countenance and encourage the race. When people call the character exaggerated, and protest that the lines are too broad to deceive anyone, they only refuse, naturally enough, to sanction in a book what half their lives is passed in tolerating, if not worshipping. Dickens, illustrating his never-failing experience of being obliged to subdue in his books what he knew to be real for fear it should be deemed impossible, had already made the remark in his Preface to *Nickleby* that

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the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary. They agree to be deceived in a reality, and reward themselves by refusing to be deceived in a fiction. That a great many people who might have sat for Pecksniff should condemn him for a grotesque impossibility, as Dickens averred to be the case, was no more than might be expected. A greater danger he has exposed more usefully in showing the larger numbers who, desiring to be thought better than they are, support eagerly pretensions that keep their own in countenance, and without being Pecksniffs, render Pecksniffs possible. All impostures would have something suspicious or too forbidding in their look if we were not prepared to meet them half-way.

And Pecksniffianism is still at the head of affairs in many of our national institutions. The intolerable cant of godliness that emanates from our blood-sucking millionaires ; the pious horror of our sleek prelates confronted with elemental facts of human nature ; the lip-service that is paid by our aristocracy to our plutocracy ; the tender solicitude of the sweater, the usurer, and the slum-owner for the poor and helpless, which goes with uplifted hands and a roll of white eyeballs ; the pestiferous hypocrisy of vote-catching politicians ; the smug self-complacency of well-paid charity-mongers : all these are unmistak-

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able manifestations of the true Pecksniffian spirit that is as rife to-day as in Dickens' day.

Pecksniff, of course, like all the other great grotesques, was merely another of the monsters that Dickens created out of the sheer exuberance of his immortal childhood. To the eyes of children all things are exaggerated; and being exaggerated are more easily and clearly observed in detail. To say that there never was such a man as Pecksniff is no doubt true enough; yet it is equally true to say that there are thousands of men like him. To say that there never was a man so vile as Carker, or a man so innocent as Boffin, is merely to say that you have forgotten your own childhood, when everyone was good or bad, kind or unkind, beautiful or ugly—to you. There is something Olympian, god-like, in the judgments of childhood. Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Dickens entered into his kingdom because he remained a child.

It was as a child of tender years that he saw Mrs. Roylance whom he afterwards turned into Mrs. Pipchin. It was as a child that he saw Mary Weller, who became the Peggotty of *David Copperfield*. But it was also with the eyes of a child, though he had long since attained to manhood, that he watched the goings-on of a certain unpleasant and rather mysterious individual with

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large prominent teeth, who was connected through his father with an eminent engineering firm, and who lived in the Oxford Road, and haunted that neighbourhood o' nights, prowling about and ogling and frightening all the servant girls. This man, probably a harmless neurotic maniac, was a notorious character: notorious in Leamington as well as in London; but nobody seems to have interfered with him—except Dickens. Dickens interfered with him to the extent of christening him "Carker," and following him to Leamington, and pestering him with gipsies, and playing the very devil with him generally. To Dickens this poor wretch was not a plain case for the hospital or the mad-house; he was a highly-coloured death's-head and skeleton masquerading as a man and behaving like a fiend.

So with Boffin and Wegg and Mr. Venus. Boffin was founded on a Mr. Dodd, a dust contractor. A Mr. Braye, of the Kensington Vestry, who knew him well, says of him:

As to the healthiness of the calling, I have the authority of a gentleman descended from a long line of dust contractors, and a near relation of Mr. Boffin, immortalised by Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* as "The Golden Dustman." This gentleman, who is still slightly connected with the dust business, I will call Boffin junior; he was well acquainted with the great novelist, made a for-



MRS HAYES

"Dolly Toodle"

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tune in the family business, devotes his time, and, I should think, a considerable sum of money, to the study of natural history—(his place is a sort of zoological and botanic garden combined);—and he is as conversant with Darwin and the great men of science as he is with the best means of making money out of dust-bin refuse. So, such is the force of habit, that he has set aside a corner of his park for the neighbouring townsfolk to shoot their dust. He says he likes the smell; it reminds him of old times. The story told by Dickens is substantially correct. Mr. Boffin had one daughter; she was sought in marriage by a gentleman of aristocratic connections. On the wedding morn the Golden Dustman, instead of coming down with a big cheque, to the dismay of the gentleman, said the only present he could make the bride would be one of his dust-heaps. The bridegroom accepted, as he thought, a bad bargain; but he sold it to the brickmakers for £10,000.

Mr. Boffin lived in a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, which was likely enough in one of those long genteel streets—Wimpole Street or Harley Street—which were Dickens' pet aversion. Here the famous Silas Wegg had his post. Denizens of the Pimlico district, who dwell "not a hundred miles from Eccleston Square," know well a sort of replica of this personage, one-legged also, who strangely, and of

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course unconsciously, reproduced many traits of the original. He is a perfect character—has his privileges, his chair, in defiance of street regulations, knows everyone in the street, and I dare say talks of “our house.” Like his predecessor, he at one time had literary tastes, and I recall his showing me verses of a pious cast which he professed to be of his own “engendure.” . . .

The original of Mr. Venus was a Mr. J. Willis, of 42 Saint Andrew's Street, Seven Dials, whom Mr. Fitzgerald (to whose admirable book *Bozland* I am indebted for the foregoing particulars) discovered on his own account. He said to Dickens: “I am convinced I have found the original of Venus,” and proceeded to describe Willis. “You are right,” said Dickens.

Mr. Venus's extraordinary establishment (Mr. Fitzgerald goes on to say) where he pursued his articulation of skeletons, &c., was fixed in Clerkenwell—where were the “poorer shops of small retail traders in commodities to eat and drink and keep folks warm, and of Italian frame-makers, and of barbers, and of brokers, and of dealers in dogs and singing-birds. From these, in a narrow and dirty street devoted to such callings, Mr. Wegg selects one dark shop-window with a tall candle dimly burning in it, surrounded by a muddle of objects vaguely resembling pieces of

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leather and dry stick, but among which nothing is resolvable into anything distinct, save the candle itself in its old tin candlestick, and two preserved frogs, fighting a small-sword duel."

I seize eagerly upon these last details of that extraordinary establishment in Clerkenwell, because I believe I have seen it. But (Mr. Fitzgerald notwithstanding) I did not see it in Clerkenwell. I saw it, as a tiny boy, in Great Portland Street, near the old Orthopædic Hospital. I used to gaze into that window with the eyes of Dickens, for I was then the only kind of child I have ever been—and that for only a few years; but Dickens was the same kind of child all his life. He could go, at fifty-five years old, and see just exactly what I saw at five years old. At five years old I saw infinities of mystery and horror and dark romance in that window; now I should look into it and see nothing. I should say: "It is so badly lighted I can see nothing in it." At five it was so badly lighted that I could see everything in it. And so, at fifty-five, could Dickens. His all-seeing eye was not so much an eye as a star, a star that contained a whole world. His eyes were the eyes of childhood, the clear bright eyes of childhood that reflect the pure blue of a spring sky, that reflect the floor of that kingdom of Heaven into which we cannot enter except we become as little children.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH
MINOR CHARACTERS

CHAPTER TWELFTH THE MINOR CHARACTERS

THERE ARE VERY FEW MINOR characters in Dickens. Many of his people whom we only speak in passing we seem to know better than we know the man next door, with whom we have chatted over our garden-fence for seven years past. There is, for example, Master Humphrey, who also appears in *The Old Curiosity Shop* as the Single Gentleman. Speaking for himself Master Humphrey says :

I am not a churlish old man. Friendless I can never be, for all mankind are my kindred, and I am on ill terms with no one member of my great family. But for many years I have led a lonely, solitary life;—what wound I sought to heal, what sorrow to forget, originally, matters not now ; it is sufficient that retirement has become a habit with me, and that I am unwilling to break the spell which for so long a time has shed its quiet influence upon my home and heart.

I live in a venerable suburb of London, in an old house which in bygone days was a famous resort for merry roysterers and peerless ladies, long since departed. It is a silent, shady place, with a paved courtyard so full of echoes, that sometimes I am tempted to believe that faint responses to the noises of old times linger there yet, and that these ghosts of sound haunt my footsteps as I

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pace it up and down. . . . Those who like to read of brilliant rooms and gorgeous furniture would derive but little pleasure from a minute description of my little dwelling. It is dear to me for the same reason that they would hold it in slight regard. Its worm-eaten doors, and low ceilings crossed by clumsy beams ; its walls of wainscot, dark stairs, and gaping closets ; its small chambers communicating with each other by winding passages or narrow steps ; its many nooks, scarce larger than its corner-cupboards ; its very dust and dulness are all dear to me. The moth and spider are my constant tenants ; for in my house the one basks in his long sleep, and the other plies his busy loom secure and undisturbed. I have a pleasure in thinking on a summer's day how many butterflies have sprung for the first time into light and sunshine from some dark corner of these old walls.

When I first came to live here, which was many years ago, the neighbours were curious to know who I was, and whence I came, and why I lived so much alone. As time went on and they still remained unsatisfied on these points I became the centre of a popular ferment, extending for half a mile round, and in one direction for a full mile. Various rumours were circulated to my prejudice. I was a spy, an infidel, a conjurer, a kidnapper of children, a refugee, a priest, a monster. . . . But when in course of time they found

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I did no harm, but on the contrary inclined towards them despite their unjust usage, they began to relent. . . . And now I never walk abroad but pleasant recognitions and smiling faces wait on Master Humphrey.

Dickens got his first hint for the character of Master Humphrey from seeing the name and description "Humphreys, clockmaker," over a shop-window in Barnard Castle, on his visit to that town in search of information about the Yorkshire schools. It was in that way that Dickens got many of his best inspirations ; though Master Humphrey can hardly be reckoned among his best, perhaps. And yet . . . there is in Master Humphrey's *naïf* introduction of himself something richly suggestive. "I have a pleasure in thinking on a summer's day how many butterflies have sprung for the first time into light and sunshine from some dark corner of these old walls," says he. How many indeed that Dickens started, that took wing, with him in hot boyish pursuit, and at last soared into the empyrean and were lost to view, leaving him gazing upward until his eyes were tired, and then gazing around him at the fairyland into which his pursuit had led him. All his butterflies lured him into fairyland, as butterflies do lead boys over hedges and through ditches, in and out of the copse, by the side of twinkling, tinkling streams, across the

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meadows, into a new strange territory that they sit down contentedly to play in, and straightway make their own.

Dickens always suggests to me a little child playing all by himself: a child clear eyed and smooth of brow, taking himself very seriously, aping the grown-ups, putting all his heart and soul into each fresh elaborate make-believe. He is surrounded by the creatures of his imagination that nevertheless bear a whimsical likeness to people he has known and half forgotten until this moment.

"Let me see," he seems to say at a certain stage of the game, "I want a funny old learned schoolmaster who was never young and yet is rather childish. Come here—you and you and you."

He summons the ghost of Dr. Everard, a worthy pedagogue of Brighton (where Dickens was at one time fond of spending week-ends), whose celebrated seminary was locally known as the "Young House of Lords," because of the aristocracy of its pupils. "You be Doctor Blimber," says Dickens. "And you be Mrs. Blimber, madam. And you, my dear young lady, if you really don't mind, be Miss Cordelia."

At another stage of the same game he is in urgent need of a nasty stiff proud man, and looking round him, hails a friend. "You, Chapman, be Mr. Dombey," says he. And forthwith Mr.

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Thomas Chapman is Mr. Dombey. He is so much like Mr. Dombey that Dickens had considerable trouble with the Phiz pictures ; he was so fearful of giving offence to his friend. That, of course, was after the game was over. And it somehow seems quite unnecessary for Forster to say of such high-spirited fun that "few things more absurd or unfounded have been invented, even of Dickens, than that he found any part of the original of Mr. Dombey in the nature, the appearance, or the manners of his excellent and much-valued friend, Mr. Thomas Chapman, the chairman of Lloyd's, with whom he held frequent kindly intercourse . . . that . . . amiable and excellent city-merchant . . . might with the same amount of justice or probability be supposed to have originated Coriolanus or Timon of Athens."

Of course he might ! In children's games the most inappropriate persons are invariably cast for the various parts, and it does not matter whether they play their parts well or ill, so long as a child with the imagination and the verve of Dickens directs and controls the revelry.

There was a Mrs. Campbell, also well-known in Leamington, whom a local jeweller describes as "laced up to the nines," and who bore such a close resemblance to Dickens' famous character that the jeweller once addressed her, absent-mindedly, as "Mrs. Skewton." "I am not Mrs. Skewton," she is said to have replied indignantly.

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She had a daughter, who was probably as unlike the second Mrs. Dombey as only one beautiful young woman can be unlike another beautiful young woman. But Dickens said to her, in his usual light-hearted irresponsible way : " I want you. You must be Edith. And you, Mrs. Campbell, must be the faded Cleopatra. . . . Advance your shrivelled ear a little more this way, please. Thank you." And it was so.

There was also a Mrs. Hayes, of Manchester, who died only a few years ago, aged ninety. Her maiden name was Littlefair ; and with such a Dickensy name as that it seems inevitable that in her youth she should have been a domestic servant in the household of Mr. Henry Burnett, Dickens' brother-in-law, whom he idealised as Nicholas Nickleby. And this dear old lady, unlike Mrs. Campbell of Leamington, always recalled with delight " wot larx " she had had in her girlhood with that there dreadful boy, Charles Dickens, who himself had often reminded her how he had used her for a character in more than one of his books, but most notably as Mrs. Polly Toodle, otherwise Richards, in *Dombey and Son*.

Three other pleasant people Dickens made to play with him : Miss Strong, Mr. Jennings or Jennens, and Captain Morgan, who figures in *A Message from the Sea* as Captain Jorgan, and who in real life was an American sailor for whom Dickens had conceived a great liking.

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Miss Strong was allotted the "fat" part of Betsy Trotwood, David Copperfield's delightful aunt.

Mr. Ashby Sterry has taken great pains to identify Miss Trotwood's house at Dover, and believes that he has done so. One is, however, disinclined—though regretfully—to accept his evidences. One is more inclined to accept those of Mr. Kitton, who boldly affirms that the original of Betsy Trotwood lived at Broadstairs. "She was a Miss Strong (says Mr. Kitton). She occupied a double-fronted cottage in the middle of Nuckell's Place, on the sea-front ; and like the admirable Betsy, she was firmly convinced of her right to stop the passage of donkeys along the road opposite her door, deterring their proprietors by means of hostile demonstrations with a hearth-broom."

The original of Mr. Jarndyce was a Mr. Jennings or Jennens.

In *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, as is well known, Dickens had in view a monstrous Chancery suit relating to the Jennings property, which had dragged on in the Courts for years, and in the end left nothing. The house was a deserted mansion at Acton, in Suffolk, which belonged to a notorious old miser Jennings or Jennens, who died in 1798, when ninety-seven years old. He made a will, but neither it nor executors could be found. At last the heir-at-law was traced in the person

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of the great-great-grandson of one C. Jennens, of Gopsal, the eldest uncle of the deceased—and who then entered into possession of the property. So lately as the year 1878 the case was in the Courts—just eighty years after the owner's death (says Mr. Fitzgerald in *Bozland*).

But Dickens, as boys will, played a little carelessly and clumsily and roughly sometimes, sometimes even a little spitefully ; and then any girls who happened to be playing with him were likely to get hurt. In illustration of this there is, notably, the sad case of Miss Mowcher, who was introduced to David Copperfield by Steerforth, and who is described as

a pursy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms that to enable herself to lay her finger archly against her snub nose as she ogled Steerforth, she was obliged to meet the finger half-way and lay her nose against it. Her chin, which was what is called a double-chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none ; waist she had none ; legs she had none worth mentioning ; for though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings generally do,

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in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a common-sized chair as at a table, resting a bag she carried on the seat. This lady, dressed in an off-hand easy style, bringing her nose and her forefinger together with the difficulty I have described; standing with her head necessarily on one side, and with one of her sharp eyes shut up making an uncommonly knowing face, after ogling Steerforth for a few moments, broke into a torrent of words.

“What! My flower!” she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him. “You’re there, are you! Oh, you naughty boy, fie for shame! what do you do so far away from home? Up to mischief, I’ll be bound. Oh, you’re a downy fellow, Steerforth, so you are, and I’m another, ain’t I? Ha, ha, ha! You’d have betted a hundred pound to five now, that you wouldn’t have seen me here, wouldn’t you? Bless you, man alive, I’m everywhere. I’m here, and there, and where not, like the conjurer’s half-crown in the lady’s handkercher. Talking of handkerchers—*and* talking of ladies—what a comfort you are to your blessed mother, ain’t you, my dear boy, over one of my shoulders, and I don’t say which!”

That was the Miss Mowcher of Dickens’ fiction; but there was also a real Miss Mowcher: her name was Mrs. Seymour Hill; and Dickens writes to Forster on 28th December 1849, whilst he was

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still in the throes of *David Copperfield*: "I have had the queerest adventure this morning, the receipt of the enclosed from Miss Mowcher! It is serio-comic, but there is no doubt one is wrong in being tempted to such a use of power." How like the small boy, who having shown off his strength to the girls is stricken with compunction, and says: "I didn't mean to hurt you, really."

Forster remarks upon this unfortunate incident:

Thinking a grotesque little oddity among his acquaintance to be safe from recognition, he had done what Smollett did sometimes, but never Fielding, and given way, in the first outburst of fun that had broken out around the fancy, to the temptation of copying too closely peculiarities of figure and face amounting in effect to deformity. He was shocked at discovering the pain he had given, and a copy is before me of the assurances by way of reply which he at once sent to the complainant. That he was grieved and surprised beyond measure. That he had not intended her altogether. That all his characters, being made up out of many people, were composite and never individual. That the chair (for table) and other matters were undoubtedly from her, but that other traits were not hers at all; and that in Miss Mowcher's "Ain't I volatile" his friends had quite correctly recognised the favourite utter-



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"Inspector Bucket"

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ance of a different person. That he felt nevertheless he had done wrong, and would now do anything to repair it. That he had intended to employ the character in an unpleasant way, but he would, whatever the risk or inconvenience, change it all, so that nothing but an agreeable impression should be left.

The other instance of a girl who might have got very badly hurt whilst playing with Master Dickens, but who apparently escaped by a miracle of un-self-consciousness, was she who was cast for the part of that most unpleasant young lady, Miss Rosa Dartle. "There are (says Forster) some natural traits in her—which Dickens' least lifelike people are never without; and it was from one of his lady friends, very familiar to him indeed, that he copied her peculiarity of never saying anything outright, but hinting it merely, and making more of it that way."

Miss Rosa Dartle is described by David as being

of a slight short figure, dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too, who attracted my attention: perhaps because I had not expected to see her: perhaps because I found myself sitting opposite to her: perhaps because of something really remarkable in her. She had black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, and had a scar upon her lip. It was

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an old scar—I should rather call it seam, for it was not discoloured and had healed years ago—which had once cut through her mouth, downward towards the chin, but was now barely visible across the table, except above and on her upper lip, the shape of which it had altered. I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated—like a house—with having been so long to let; yet had, as I have said, an appearance of good looks. Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes.

Now, do you know, whenever I read that description—that description barbed and tipped with caustic—I always feel that Dickens had some living person in his mind whom he virulently disliked; and I have always a sense of relief at the thought that his lady friend, mentioned by Forster, never realised how her own trivial peculiarities of speech had been grafted on to this object of Dickens' profound dislike. I am always very glad to know that the lady did not know how terribly near she was to getting very badly hurt indeed.

Of the other characters which belong to this chapter, and which (for convenience's sake) I have

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dubbed "minor," though few of them are in any sense "minor," I would mention, first, Gaffer Hexam and Charlie Hexam, who exhibit in their two personalities one of the most effective studies in contrast that even Dickens conceived. And they were derived from a mere passing glimpse of two commonplace figures in the street.

"I must use somehow," says Dickens in one of his letters to Forster, "the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles whom Leech and I saw at Chatham."

He did use them in *Our Mutual Friend*, used them as the lever and the fulcrum upon which to raise the whole weighty question of popular education. Between the wild fierce man, with the hooked nose, the bright glancing eyes, and the ruffled head, that gave him a certain likeness to a bird of prey: between that coarse ignorant man, and that insufferable prig, his son, whose scholarly attainments only served to afflict him with a worse coarseness and a more grievous ignorance: a coarseness of soul far worse than any coarseness of fibre, a coarseness that blunted all his finer feelings, and an ignorance of the heart far worse than any ignorance of the mind, an ignorance that left him in the outer darkness and loneliness of utter separation from his kin: between these two there is a contrast struck, there is a great gulf fixed, that all the Education Acts of the last forty years have been powerless to bridge.

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It needed the eyes of a prophet to see the significance of those two figures of the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles, already in his childhood taking short views of life. Dickens did see the significance of that queer unnatural and yet natural juxtaposition of two alien minds in two bodies that were one flesh. He had, when he saw this, grown up a little ; but there was still enough of the immortal child left in him to exaggerate these figures into gigantic portents. One has not to go far to find the originals of Gaffer Hexam and his boy, Charlie ; the Gaffer is in every slum, Charlie in every suburb.

It was from similar fleeting impressions of small things involving great issues that Dickens spun the filaments of the tangle of *Edwin Drood*, and created the atmosphere of such fine moral tales as *Tom Tiddler's Ground*. Mr. Mopes the Hermit was founded on a poor besotted wretch, James Lucas, known as Mad Lucas, of Knebworth, a miser who lived in the kitchen of his house, Elmwood House, at Redcoats Green, near Stevenage. James Lucas, "the Hertfordshire Hermit," was really a well-educated and highly intellectual man, who inherited the estate of his father, a prosperous West India merchant, and it is conjectured that his distress at the death of his widowed mother (who lived with him) was primarily the cause of that mental aberration which assumed such an eccentric form. He even refused

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to bury her corpse, so that the local authorities were compelled to resort to a subterfuge in order to perform themselves the last rites. He objected to furnish his rooms, and, attired simply in a loose blanket fastened with a skewer, preferred to eat and sleep amidst the cinders and rubbish-heaps (a sanctuary for rats) which accumulated in the kitchen. Although his diet consisted of bread-and-cheese, red herrings, and gin, there were choice wines available for friendly visitors, a special vintage of sherry being reserved for ladies who thus honoured him. The hermit's *penchant* for tramps attracted all the vagabonds in the neighbourhood, so that it became necessary for him to protect himself from insult by retaining armed watchmen and barricading the house. That he sat for Mr. Mopes is certain from the fact that, on reading *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, he expressed great indignation at what he considered to be a much exaggerated account of himself and his environment.

Dickens describes him, and denounces his cult, thus:

Mr. Traveller . . . betook himself towards the ruined hermitage of Mr. Mopes the hermit.

For Mr. Mopes, by suffering everything about him to go to ruin, and by dressing himself in a blanket and skewer, and by steeping himself in soot and grease and other nastiness, had acquired

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great renown in all that countryside—far greater renown than he could ever have won for himself, if his career had been that of any ordinary Christian or decent Hottentot. He had even blanketed and skewered and sooted and greased himself into the London papers. And it was curious to find, as Mr. Traveller found by stopping for a new direction at this farmhouse or at that cottage as he went along, with how much accuracy the morbid Mopes had counted on the weakness of his neighbours to embellish him. A mist of home-brewed marvel and romance surrounded Mopes, in which (as in all fogs) the real proportions of the real object were extravagantly heightened. . . . Even as to the easy facts of how old he was, or how long he had held verminous occupation of his blanket and skewer, no consistent information was to be got, from those who must know if they would. He was represented as being all the ages between five-and-twenty and sixty, and as having been a hermit seven years, twelve, twenty, thirty,—though twenty on the whole appeared to be the favourite term.

“Well, well!” said Mr. Traveller. “At any rate let us see what a real live hermit looks like.” So Mr. Traveller went on, and on, and on, until he came to *Tom Tiddler’s Ground*.

It was a nook in a rustic by-road, which the genius of Mopes had laid waste, as if he had been

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born an Emperor and a Conqueror. Its centre object was a dwelling-house, sufficiently substantial, all the window-glass of which had been long ago abolished by the surprising genius of Mopes, and all the windows of which were barred across with rough-split logs of trees nailed over them on the outside. A rickyard, hip-high in vegetable rankness and ruin, contained outbuildings, from which the thatch had lightly fluttered away, on all the winds of all the seasons of the year, and from which the planks and beams had heavily dropped and rotted. The frosts and damps of winter, and the heats of summer, had warped what wreck remained, so that not a post or a board retained the position it was meant to hold, but everything was twisted from its purpose, like its owner, and degraded and debased. In this homestead of the sluggard, behind the ruined hedge, and sinking away among the ruined grass and the nettles, were the last perishing fragments of certain ricks: which had gradually mildewed and collapsed, until they looked like mounds of rotten honeycomb, or dirty sponge. Tom Tiddler's Ground could even show its ruined water; for there was a slimy pond into which a tree or two had fallen—one sappy trunk and branches lay across it then—which in its accumulation of stagnant weed, and in its black decomposition, and in all its foulness and filth, was almost comforting, regarded as the only

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water that could have reflected the shameful place without seeming polluted by that low office.

The Traveller opens the outer gate of these premises.

Swung upon its rusty hinges, it admitted him into a yard in which there was nothing to be seen but an outhouse attached to the ruined building, with a barred window in it. As there were traces of many recent footsteps under this window, and as it was a low window, and unglazed, Mr. Traveller made bold to peep within the bars. And there to be sure he had a real live Hermit before him, and could judge how the real dead Hermits used to look.

He was lying on a bank of soot and cinders, on the floor, in front of a rusty fireplace. There was nothing else in the dark little kitchen, or scullery, or whatever else his den had been originally used as, but a table with a litter of old bottles on it. A rat made a clatter among these bottles, jumped down, and ran over the real live hermit on his way to his hole, or the man in *his* hole would not have been so easily discernible. Tickled in the face by the rat's tail, the owner of Tom Tiddler's Ground opened his eyes, saw Mr. Traveller, started up, and sprang to the window.

"Humph!" thought Mr. Traveller, retiring a pace or two from the bars. "A compound of Newgate, Bedlam, a Debtor's Prison in the worst

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time, a chimney-sweep, a mudlark, and the Noble Savage! A nice old family, the Hermit family! Hah!"

Mr. Traveller thought this, as he silently confronted the sooty object in the blanket and skewer (in sober truth it wore nothing else), with the matted hair and the staring eyes. Further, Mr. Traveller thought, as the eyes surveyed him with a very obvious curiosity in ascertaining the effect they produced, "Vanity, vanity, vanity! Verily, all is vanity!"

I have dwelt thus upon this study of Mr. Mopes, because it seems to me to illustrate once again, with profound truth and irresistible force, Dickens' almost preternatural sense of the deep significance of things that to the casual observer seem merely crazy and unmeaning. Dickens realised, when he saw Mr. Mopes—if he had never realised it before—that there is a pride of sin and silliness and sloth, filth and ugliness and beastliness, as well as a pride of goodness and wisdom and endeavour, beauty and cleanliness and godliness. That Dickens should exclaim: "Vanity! Verily, all is vanity!" on beholding the spectacle of this abandoned wretch's degradation, testifies to the penetrating quality of his genius as perhaps no other passage in all his more important work does.

From another side of his many-sided genius

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he flashes a light upon the possibilities of romance that lie hidden from the eyes of us average folk amid the most squalid and revolting surroundings. From a glimpse into the interior of an opium-den he drew inspiration for that shining chain of weird imaginings only a few links of which he forged in the unsolved Mystery of *Edwin Drood*.

The scene of John Jasper's horrible debauches was just beyond the churchyard of Saint George's-in-the-East, at Stepney. The Reverend Harry Jones, rector from 1873 to 1882, mentions that the old crone was known as Lascar Sal, and was living at the time he wrote, 1875. "In a miserable court at night," writes Mr. James T. Fields, who was Dickens' companion on the occasion of his visit to this opium-den, "we found a haggard old woman blowing at a kind of pipe made of an old ink-bottle; and the words that Dickens puts into the mouth of this wretched creature in *Edwin Drood*, we heard her croon as we leaned over the tattered bed in which she was lying."

But it would be only too easy to multiply instances from Dickens' books of great events springing from the most trivial causes, of fine effects achieved by dint of sheer imagination applied to the most commonplace incidents and accidents of everyday life.

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"Even the catastrophe in *Little Dorrit* is evidently borrowed from the recent fall of houses in Tottenham Court Road, which happens to have appeared in the newspapers at a convenient period," says the *Edinburgh Review* of August 1857. Could pompous inanity bray more discordantly, more flatulently? *Even*. . . . Here assuredly is a case of the fool that came to scoff remaining—if not to pray—to pay the highest possible tribute that ever egregious ignorance and purblind superciliousness ever did pay to the greatness that it was far too little to comprehend. The crowning wonder and glory of Dickens lay in his power of transmuting the commonest material into purest gold. The news of the day, the gossip of an hour, he laid under the spell to his genius, and retold as a fairy tale.

He transmuted that most wooden and unmal-leable of all English types, the policeman turned detective, into an immortal, named him Bucket, and—as it were in his stride—invented the whole art and craft of detective-story-writing as it is practised to-day. Inspector Bucket of the Detective was founded on Inspector Field, who also figures as Detective Wield in *Reprinted Pieces*, and is therein described as "a middle-aged man of portly presence, with a large, moist, knowing eye, a husky voice, and a habit of emphasising his conversation by the aid of a corpulent forefinger, which is constantly in juxtaposition with his eyes

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or nose," and in *Bleak House* as "a sharp-eyed man—a quick keen man—who takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man. . . . Mr. Bucket and his fat forefinger are much in consultation together. . . . When Mr. Bucket has a matter of pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise to the dignity of a familiar demon. He puts it to his ears, and it whispers information ; he puts it to his lips, and it enjoins him to secrecy ; he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent ; he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction. The Augurs of the Detective Temple invariably predict that when Mr. Bucket and that finger are in much conference, a terrible avenger will be heard of before long." But all that Inspector Field provided was the clothes, which he doubtless wore with the air of wearing a uniform ; it was Dickens who filled those clothes with the concentrated essence of that modern wonder-worker who bulks so large in so many tales, and whom we know most familiarly as Sherlock Holmes.

And then there is Gridley, the Man from Shropshire, also, whose "case (says Dickens in his preface to *Bleak House*) is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous

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wrong from beginning to end." He, like that other obscure litigant Jennens, like the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles, like Mad Lucas of Knebworth and that other nameless madman of the Oxford Road, like Lascar Sal and Miss Strong and Mr. Willis ; all these are as shadows or names : as shadows on a blind, without colour or substance ; as names in a directory . . . until Dickens chances upon them. And then his genius transforms them into beings of more than flesh and blood, huge creatures that fill the purview like a mountain and touch the clouds, as the smoke that poured out from the fisherman's pot, in the *Arabian Nights*, filled the air and darkened the sky, and then, imperceptibly, invested itself with the magic and the charm of genius.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH
DICKENS' CONTEMPORARIES





JUDGE TALFOURD

"Tommy Fraddies"

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH SOME DICKENS' CONTEMPORARIES

IT IS ODD THAT DICKENS, IN HIS attempts to draw the portraits of some of his contemporaries, should have only succeeded (as it were by inadvertence) in lampooning two men whom he liked extremely, and have failed to flatter a man whom he did not like nearly so well.

But before we approach the vexed question of the identities of Leigh Hunt, Walter Savage Landor, and John Forster, there are Miss Harriet Martineau, Judge Talfourd, and Sir Peter Lawrie to be considered. Of Sir Peter Lawrie it is enough to say that he was instantly recognised as the original of Alderman Cute in *The Chimes*, a magistrate who, like Sir Peter himself, expressed a strong determination to put down all offences in general, and suicide in particular, by the most drastic methods.

In April 1844, writing to Tom Hood, whose *Song of the Shirt* had appeared in the last Christmas number of *Punch*, Dickens calls his attention to the case of an unfortunate sempstress "making shirts at three-halfpence apiece," who, being robbed of her wretched earnings, attempted to drown herself, and was told from the bench, among other cruel things, that she had "no hope of mercy either in this world or in the world to come." Very shortly afterward *The Bridge of Sighs* was published in *Hood's Magazine*.

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But—to take the next name on our list—it would never have been assumed, I think, that Miss Martineau had any least affinity with Mrs. Jellyby if she had not gone out of her way to attack Dickens for his satire upon the Borrioboola Gha type of philanthropy. Certainly between the plucky, afflicted, learned, and indefatigable author of so many and such various works as *Deerbrook*, *The Hour and the Man*, *The Peasant and the Prince*, *Eastern Life, Past and Present*, and countless other volumes of fiction, theology, history, criticism, and philosophy, which poured from her untiring pen, there is little apparent resemblance to the “pretty, very diminutive, plump woman, of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if . . . they could see nothing nearer than Africa! . . . Mrs. Jellyby had very good hair, but was too much occupied with her African duties to brush it. The shawl in which she had been loosely muffled, dropped on to her chair . . . and as she turned to resume her seat, we could not help noticing that her dress didn’t nearly meet up the back, and that the open space was railed across with a lattice-work of staylace—like a summer-house.”

It really was something of an outrage to compare the neat, prim, patient, and rather severe Miss Martineau with this little, fat, comely, smil-

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ing, placid, preoccupied, good-natured mother of a swarming progeny in which she took no least interest.

In Tommy Traddles, however, Dickens did indicate something of the fine pathetic quality of his friend, Judge Talfourd. His public tribute to the memory of his friend may be quoted in this connection, quite appropriately, I think.

This upright judge and good man died suddenly at Stafford in the discharge of his duties. Mercifully spared protracted pain and mental decay, he passed away in a moment, with words of Christian eloquence, of brotherly tenderness and kindness towards all men, yet unfinished on his lips.

As he died he had always lived. So amiable a man, so gentle, so sweet-tempered, of such a noble simplicity, so perfectly unspoiled by his labours and their rewards, is very rare indeed upon this earth. . . .

The chief delight of his life was to give delight to others. His nature was so exquisitely kind that to be kind was its highest happiness. Those who had the privilege of seeing him in his own home when his public successes were greatest—so modest, so contented with little things, so interested in humble persons and humble efforts, so surrounded by children and young people, so adored in remembrance of a domestic generosity

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and greatness of heart too sacred to be unveiled here, can never forget the pleasure of that sight. . . .

The hand that lays this poor flower on his grave was a mere boy's when he first clasped it — newly come from the work in which he himself began life—little used to the plough it has followed since—obscure enough, with much to correct and learn. Each of its successive tasks through many intervening years has been cheered by his warmest interest, and the friendship then begun has ripened to maturity in the passage of time; but there was no more self-assertion or condescension in his winning goodness at first than at last. The success of other men made as little change in him as his own.

But we do seem to get a glimpse of Traddles in the more comic and sincere, loyal and lovable Talfourd, in the Talfourd whom Forster describes in his more prosaic fashion as "facile and fluent of kindest speech," and as assuming nothing with the ermine but the privilege of more frequent intercourse with the tastes and friends he loved, but continuing to be the most joyous and least affected of companions. "Such small oddities or foibles as he had (says Forster) made him secretly only dearer to Dickens, who had no friend he was more attached to; and the many happy nights made happier by the voice so

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affluent in generous words, and the face so bright with ardent sensibility, come back to me sorrowfully now."

It was in 1844 that Talfourd assisted Dickens to put an end to the piracy of his writings, every one of which had been reproduced with merely such colourable changes of titles, incidents and names of characters, as were believed to be sufficient to evade the law, and adapt them to "penny" purchasers. So shamelessly had this been going on ever since the days of *Pickwick*, in so many outrageous ways and with all but impunity, that a course repeatedly urged by Talfourd and Forster was at last taken in this year with the *Christmas Carol* and the *Chuzzlewit* pirates. Upon a case of such peculiar flagrancy, however, that the vice-chancellor would not even hear Dickens' counsel; and what it cost our dear friend Talfourd (says Forster) to suppress his speech exceeded by very much the labour and pains with which he had prepared it. "The pirates," wrote Dickens . . . "are beaten flat. They are bruised, bloody, battered, smashed, squelched, and utterly undone. Knight Bruce would not hear Talfourd, but instantly gave judgment. He had interrupted Anderton constantly by asking him to produce a passage which was not an expanded or contracted idea from my book. And at every successive passage he cried out, 'That is Mr. Dickens' case. Find another! Oh, the agony of Tal-

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fourd at Knight Bruce's not hearing him! He had sat up till three in the morning, he says, preparing his speech."

There were few finer characters in real life than Judge Talfourd, as there are few finer characters in Dickens than Tommy Traddles.

Poor Traddles! In a tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like German sausages, or roly-poly puddings, he was the merriest and most miserable of all the boys. He was always being caned . . . and was always going to write to his uncle about it, and never did. After laying his head on the desk for a little while, he would cheer up somehow, begin to laugh again, and draw skeletons all over his slate, before his eyes were dry. I used at first to wonder what comfort Traddles found in drawing skeletons; and for some time looked upon him as a sort of hermit, who reminded himself by those symbols of mortality that caning couldn't last for ever. But I believe he only did it because they were easy, and didn't want any features.

He was very honourable, Traddles was, and held it as a solemn duty in the boys to stand by one another. He suffered for this on several occasions; and particularly once, when Steerforth laughed in church and the Beadle thought it was Traddles, and took him out. I see him now, going away in custody, despised by the congrega-

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tion. He never said who was the real offender, though he smarted for it next day, and was imprisoned so many hours that he came forth with a whole churchyardful of skeletons swarming all over his Latin dictionary. "But he had his reward," says Dickens.

Ay, verily, he had his reward!

"Mis-ter and Mis-sis Podsnap!"

"My dear," says Mr. Veneering to Mrs. Veneering, with an air of much friendly interest, while the door stands open, "the Podsnaps."

A too, too smiling large man, with a fatal freshness on him, appearing with his wife, instantly deserts his wife and darts at Twemlow with :

"How do you do? So glad to know you. Charming house you have here. I hope we are not late. So glad of this opportunity, I am sure."

When the first shock fell upon him, Twemlow twice skipped back in his neat little shoes and his neat little silk stockings of a bygone fashion, as if impelled to leap over a sofa behind him; but the large man closed with him and proved too strong.

"Let me," says the large man, trying to attract the attention of his wife in the distance, "have the pleasure of presenting Mrs. Podsnap to her host. She will be," in his fatal freshness he seems to find perpetual verdure and eternal youth in the

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phrase, "she will be so glad of this opportunity, I am sure!"

. . . In this complicated dilemma, Mr. Veneering approaches the large man with extended hand, and smilingly assures that incorrigible personage that he is delighted to see him: who in his fatal freshness instantly replies:

"Thank you. I am ashamed to say that I cannot at this moment recall where we met, but I am so glad of this opportunity, I am sure!" . . .

The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects . . . Podsnap, preposterously feeding, two little light-coloured, wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hair-brushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of shirt-collar up behind. . . .

Mr. Podsnap was well-to-do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There

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was a dignified conclusiveness—not to say a grand convenience—in this way of getting rid of disagreeables, which had done much towards establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!" Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away. . . .

As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. Inferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr. Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant.

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A really repellent monster, this Podsnap. And yet . . . intimates recognised in this ugly picture a portrait of Dickens' chosen friend, close confidant, and official biographer, John Forster himself.

To his friend, John Forster (says Mr. Fitzgerald, who was pretty well acquainted with both Forster and Dickens) was submitted everything he wrote, who conscientiously exercised his office of reviser and suggester of improvements during a long course of years—a troublesome and laborious task when thoroughly carried out. Forster had often a substantial share in directing the course of the stories, and we find passages omitted and phrases altered at his suggestion. It was a bold thing, therefore, under such conditions, to introduce his friend in a shape that was recognisable. It may be thought that this was hardly a “correct” thing, but I really believe Dickens was helpless in the matter, and was all but compelled by the pressure of his story, and its situations, to introduce such a character. It was a general type, of which Forster's was the species. A professional observer as he was, he relished any of the specially humorous traits of his friend with the keenest enjoyment ; and these certainly belonged to the highest form of comedy.

Forster, it would appear, was not very popular among his contemporaries ; and if he did

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indeed resemble Podsnap—or Doctor Johnson, whom he is said also to have resembled—one cannot wonder at his unpopularity. Whatever else he may have been, however, he was a constant and devoted friend to Dickens ; and if my opinion counts for anything in this connection, I think that his biography stands as a monument of staunch, deep, and discerning friendship. When he died it was said by *The Times* that, although many were disposed at first sight to think him obstinate and overbearing, they were bound in the long run to confess that they had in reality found him to be one of the tenderest and most generous of men. I am well satisfied to let *The Times* have the last word.

But . . . there are some who say that in depicting Podsnap Dickens was unconsciously depicting himself, as he was in the latter part of his life. I don't think it really matters; but certainly some of Dickens' public utterances might have been put into the mouth of Podsnap without any glaring incongruity. Though this is merely to state the obvious, after all, since there must always be something of the author in every one of his characters.

I think it most unlikely that Dickens had any thought of his friend Forster in his mind when he projected Podsnap. But I do think it most likely that he had Leigh Hunt in his mind when he pro-

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jected Harold Skimpole ; and that he lampooned Leigh Hunt, as it were in his own despite.

But Dickens himself, writing in *All the Year Round* on the Christmas Eve of 1859, and in a letter to Leigh Hunt himself, has said all that needs to be said on this point.

Four or five years ago, the writer of these lines was much pained by accidentally encountering a printed statement, " that Mr. Leigh Hunt was the original of Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*." The statement came from America. It is no disrespect to that country, in which the writer has perhaps as many friends and as true an interest as any man that lives, good-humouredly to state the fact that he has now and then been the subject of paragraphs in Transatlantic newspapers, more surprisingly destitute of all foundation in truth than the wildest delusions of the wildest lunatics. For reasons born of this experience, he let the thing go by.

But since Mr. Leigh Hunt's death the statement has been revived in England. The delicacy and generosity evinced in its revival are for the rather late consideration of its revivers. The fact is this: Exactly those graces and charms of manner which are remembered . . . were remembered by the author of the work of fiction in question, when he drew the character in question. Above all other things, that sort of gay and ostentatious

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wilfulness in the humouring of a subject, which had many a time delighted him, and impressed him as being unspeakably whimsical and attractive, was the airy quality he wanted for the man he invented. Partly for this reason, and partly (he has since often grieved to think) for the pleasure it afforded him to find that delightful manner reproducing itself under his hand, he yielded to the temptation of too often making the character *speak* like his old friend. He no more thought, God forgive him! that the admired original would ever be charged with the imaginary vices of the fictitious creature, than he has himself ever thought of charging the blood of Desdemona and Othello, on the innocent Academy model who sat for Iago's leg in the picture. Even as to the mere occasional manner, he meant to be so cautious and conscientious, that he privately referred the proof sheets of the first number of that book to two intimate literary friends of Leigh Hunt (both still living), and altered the whole of that part of the text on their discovering too strong a resemblance to his "way."

His letter to Leigh Hunt himself is as follows:

Separate in your own mind what you see of yourself from what other people tell you that they see. As it has given you so much pain, I take it at its worst, and say I am deeply sorry, and that I feel I did wrong in doing it. I should otherwise have

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taken it at its best, and ridden off upon what I strongly feel to be the truth, that there is nothing in it that *should* have given you pain. Every one in writing must speak from points of his experience, and so I of mine with you: but when I have felt it was going too close I stopped myself, and the most blotted parts of my MSS. are those in which I have been striving hard to make the impression I was writing from *unlike* you. The diary writing I took from Haydon, not from you. I now first learn from yourself that you ever set anything to music, and I could not have copied *that* from you. The character is not you, for there are traits in it common to fifty thousand people besides, and I did not fancy you would ever recognise it. Under similar disguises my own father and mother are in my books, and you might as well see your likeness in Micawber.

This chapter begins by saying it is odd that Dickens, in his attempts to draw the portraits of some of his contemporaries, should have only succeeded (as it were by inadvertence) in lampooning two men whom he liked extremely, and have failed to flatter a man whom he did not like so well. The man last referred to is Walter Savage Landor.

I have already said that I think it is often too lightly assumed that Dickens was very ill-acquainted with the work of his immediate prede-

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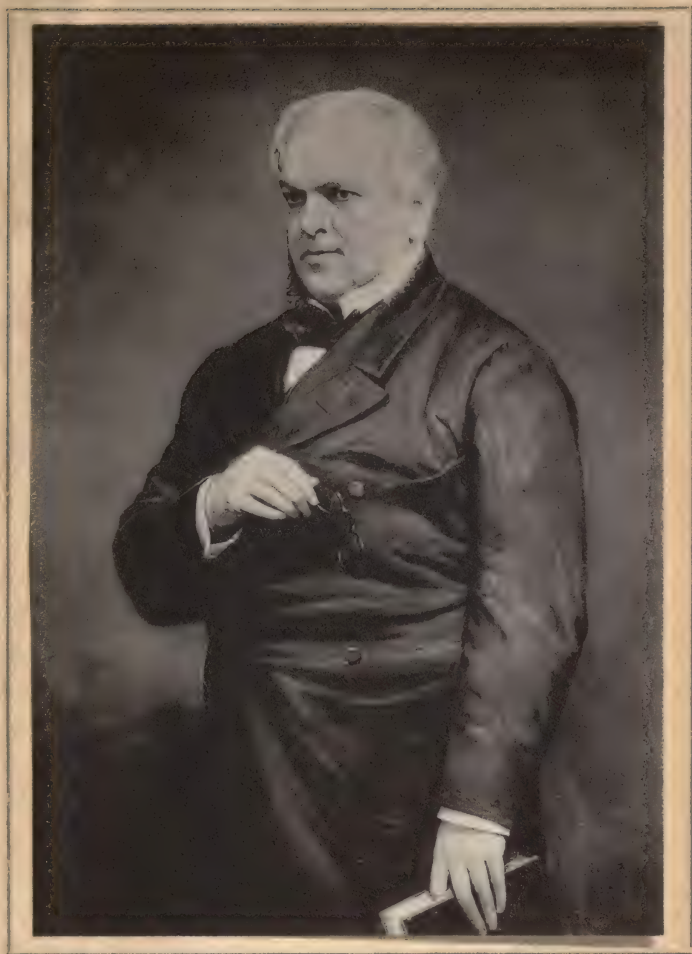
cessors and contemporaries in the higher walks of literature; though, beyond question, there was never anything of the mere bookman about him at any time. And that probably, in his early days, he knew surprisingly little of the great poets who had attained their apogee when he was only just emerging from his swaddling-clothes. But we do know that he was intimate with Walter Savage Landor during the latter part of his life, and liked him. At the same time it cannot be gainsaid that his liking was tinctured with a feeling of something perilously akin to good-natured tolerance. In one of his letters to Forster this significant reference occurs: "As Landor would say, 'most woonderful'"; and somehow that seems to suggest rather a keen sense of the humour of the personal friend's peculiarities and mannerisms than any very adequate appreciation of the great poet and satirist's superb qualities of mind.

Now Landor was a born rebel. Because of his outspoken sympathies with the French Revolutionaries he had been known at Oxford as the "mad Jacobin," and eventually rusticated therefrom. All his life he had held the most heterodox views on every conceivable subject—among others, that Napoleon was a ridiculously over-rated man. He was indeed as much an insurgent in temperament as either Shelley or Byron, whose unpopular views on politics and religion he shared and espoused. But it is plain that

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Dickens miraculously escaped these influences which so deeply affected other young men of his age and time. He could hardly have been entirely ignorant of the existence of these turbulent spirits ; but presumably he was not attracted by their mutinous methods, and did not trouble to investigate for himself their claims to a fair and impartial hearing. In short, it is most likely that if he considered them at all, he adopted the conventional thin attitude toward them of scornful indifference, shot with bewilderment and horror.

Thus he was never in sympathy with Landor ; he could not understand him ; and so he failed woefully in his attempt to draw a flattering portrait of him as Lawrence Boythorn. He failed to make Lawrence Boythorn live. You don't really believe in Boythorn. He is too harshly coloured, too flat, too opaque, too loud, too crude altogether. You feel that you don't know Boythorn, and don't very much want to know him : certainly he never comes within leagues of interesting you as Skimpole does. For he does not seem to be himself at all. He seems to be all the time trying to impersonate some one else. He is as much a *poseur* in his way as Major Bagstock. At least that is how he appears to one reader of Dickens. And I am encouraged in this view by Dickens' own words when he says : " He was one of the few men of whom you might always know the whole : of whom you might always



JOHN FORSTER

"Dessler." "Pödsnap."



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know the worst, as well as the best. He had no reservations or duplicities. 'No, by Heaven!' he would say (with unimaginable energy) if any good adjective were coupled with him which he did not deserve: 'I am nothing of the kind. I wish I were; but I don't deserve the attribute, and I never did, and I never shall!' His intense consciousness of himself never led to his poorly excusing himself, and seldom to his violently asserting himself."

But it was precisely because Dickens accepted Landor at his face value that he deceived himself about Landor. Landor was a man of infinite subtlety. Only a man of infinite subtlety could have written the dialogues between Bossuet and the Duchess de Fontanges, and Peter the Great and his son, in which the pungent irony stings upon the palate like strong wine. Only a man of infinite subtlety could, with such adroit art and consummate mastery of his means, have belittled Plato and extolled Alfieri as the greatest man of his time. His *Imaginary Conversations* stand as the product of thoughts as intricate and delicate as the convolutions of the human brain itself. Dickens respected Landor for the qualities that they shared in common: for his "noble scorn of all littleness, all cruelty, oppression, fraud, and false pretence." It was on the score of those qualities that Dickens tried to glorify Landor in *Bleak House*. But these were merely the qualities that

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made Landor a gentleman. The qualities that made him a genius Dickens did not understand. Thus it is that Landor, as Boythorn, seems to be something of a gentleman, certainly ; but at the same time rather an old fool.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH
DICKENS HIMSELF

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH OF CHARLES DICKENS HIMSELF

THAT LIVELY PERCEPTION OF THE ludicrous which we all possess in greater or smaller measure, has been very rightly called the saving sense of humour. It saves our souls alive. It saves our hearts from breaking. It saves us from all manner of folly and wickedness and sorrow and despair. In effect, it saves us from our worst enemy, who is oftenest ourself.

But the humour sense manifests itself in vastly dissimilar ways. There are many kinds and degrees of the sense. It varies in different climes and in different ages. It waxes and wanes with our growth and decline, and assumes as many colours and forms in the course of a life as the procession of the seasons assumes in the course of a year. It is raw and crude in our infancy, full-blooded and flamboyant and boisterous in the hot summer of our lusty youth, ripe and mellow and kindly in our autumnal prime, and cold and bleak and comfortless in the wintry cynicism of old age.

It has been asserted that most men would rather plead guilty to every crime in the Decalogue than to a lack of humour. "A man without *humour* in himself," Shakespeare might have said, just as aptly, if he had thought of it, "is only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; let

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no such man be trusted." And Emerson does say that "a man alive to the ludicrous is still convertible," and further that "when that sense is lost his fellow-men can do little for him." Against this latter saying, however, I can foresee that some one may set the authentic quotation from *Hamlet* to the effect that "one may smile and smile, and be a villain." And so one may. But then one might as easily smile, and smile, and be a hero, and still have as little sense of humour as a sane man can have. For to be devoid of all sense of humour is to be mad. The simple truth seems to be that the humour sense has nothing whatever to do with a man's capacity for laughter, or for making other people laugh. I dare say Dickens has caused as much mirth as any other author, and yet his sense of humour was curiously defective. It seems to have played hardly any part in his private life. Certainly, it did not save him from taking himself far too seriously at times, or from occasionally making himself rather absurd, as a fuller sense of humour would. He had exuberant animal spirits, and that fondness for practical joking and buffoonery which one usually associates with that least humorous of young animals, the schoolboy ; but he had not, as Thackeray had, that faculty of self-criticism and self-restraint, and that half-sad, half-whimsical attitude toward life-in-the-large which betokens a richer and profounder sense of humour,

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and which is, indeed, more rarely found in the professional funny man than in the man of the world.

The humour sense is at once a stultifying and an enlarging sense. Its possession would have stultified Napoleon by enabling him to realise his physical insignificance and the magnificent fatuity of his ambitions. It would have helped the Little Corporal to see himself as his comrades saw him, and then he could not have gone on. Later, it would have forced him to consider, in their due proportions, the value of his victories as compared with the worthlessness of his crown. Finally, after Elba, it would have saved him from St. Helena. But to such men as Shakespeare and Meredith—to cite the Alpha and Omega of English philosophy—it was an enlarging sense in that it prevented them from ever becoming ridiculous in their quest after the sublime, and showed them how to be god-like without sloughing their humanity, how to be dignified without pomposity or bombast.

Dickens' many limitations are mainly attributable to his lack of this saving sense; but then his many triumphs are due to his lack of it, too.

My point is that because Dickens, until he approached middle age, lacked that particular refinement of the humour sense, he was always too much himself, he was always too much bound up

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in himself, to get outside himself and see himself as he really was.

Thus, in the autobiography of *David Copperfield*, wherein he figures as David, he gives an ever less clear and convincing presentment of David as he finds David becoming more and more a contemporary of Charles Dickens. As child, boy, youth, and young man, David is excellent. We know him. We believe in him. We recognise ourselves in him. And we love him. Then, somehow, David begins to fade into a mere shadow of his former self. He becomes rather like Dickens' other woodenly impossible heroes : like Harry Maylie, Nicholas Nickleby, Edward Haredale, and the rest. And as the flesh-and-blood reality of the child, the boy, the youth, the young man, melt away into the filmy indeterminate outlines of the maturer David, we are sensible of losing all interest in him. The first part of *David Copperfield* interests us because of David. The last part barely succeeds in interesting us in spite of him, as a moving record of the doings and sayings of other folk than David.

Until Steerforth betrays Little Em'ly and disappears from the story, David is an ever fresh and diverting companion. After that, he becomes rather wearisome. We feel, somehow, that in the character of Steerforth, who, it is said, was founded on a certain George Stroughill, brother of Miss Lucy Stroughill, a winsome, golden-haired

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maiden, who lived in the same street at Chatham in which the Dickens family lived when Charles was a tiny boy, whom Charles made childish love to, and who figures as Golden Lucy in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*: in Steerforth we seem to feel that we have just that human heroic quality which David is so unnaturally deficient in. We are even fain to wonder whether, if David instead of Steerforth had betrayed Little Em'ly, we should not have been more interested in him, have even loved him a little better for the passion and the sin, the rapture and the agony, which Dickens might have been inspired to describe instead of the pretty-prettinesses of Dora and the insipid domesticities of Agnes.

But Dickens never would have been inspired to any such artistic purpose, because of just that lack of the saving sense of humour which constrained him to gloze and sublimate the facts of life, and to idealise all men, even himself.

In *Great Expectations* he gives us again a picture of himself as the love-lorn Pip; and again he baulks himself on the verge of a grand passion, again he pauses upon the edge of a great gulf into which he might have flung himself, and so remained with us for ever in the glittering similitude of a fallen angel hurtling down from Heaven into Hell. (Even to suggest the image is to provoke a smile.)

He might have done that . . . if he had been

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an altogether different type of man. But he was, emphatically, the type of man that would never dream of perpetrating romance in his own person. He was always acutely, nervously conscious that in David and in Pip he had revealed the child he used to be; and that that child was henceforth himself, to be taken very seriously, very solemnly, to be kept apart and held inviolate from the common temptations, the sins and the lusts of the flesh, that poor average humanity is heir to. Dickens' muse bore a strange likeness to Mrs. Grundy.

He was, however, far enough off from his childhood to tell us exactly what he was like as a child, what he, as a child, thought and felt and did and suffered. He was still far enough off from his boyhood to make David and Pip very human boys; and still not so close to his own youth as to be afraid to give a very accurate impression of the wild dreams and desires and aspirations and vain longings of youth. But he was a good deal too close to the young man he had been not so many years ago: he was still a young man when he wrote *David Copperfield*: to be too frank about that part of his life. He seizes on its humours, its comic misgivings and doubts and ecstasies, and makes the most of them and the best of them, in default of anything better.

Then . . . the young man is himself, Charles Dickens; and he veils himself in mystery.

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A change took place in Dickens after he had written *David Copperfield*. I have a suspicion that David Copperfield introduced him to himself. Anyway, in all his later books he is far more worldly-wise. He seems to be developing a personal sense of humour at last. There is more light and shade in his later character-drawing. William Dorrit, the Father of the Marshalsea, for instance, always seems to me to present a far more likely portrait of his own father, John Dickens, than Micawber—though I infinitely prefer Micawber, of course. But all his characters, with a few noble exceptions, are more probable. And this (I believe) because Dickens had come to a better understanding of himself, had sunk a little of the magician in the man of the world ; and so
set up a new standard by which
to judge his fellow-men.

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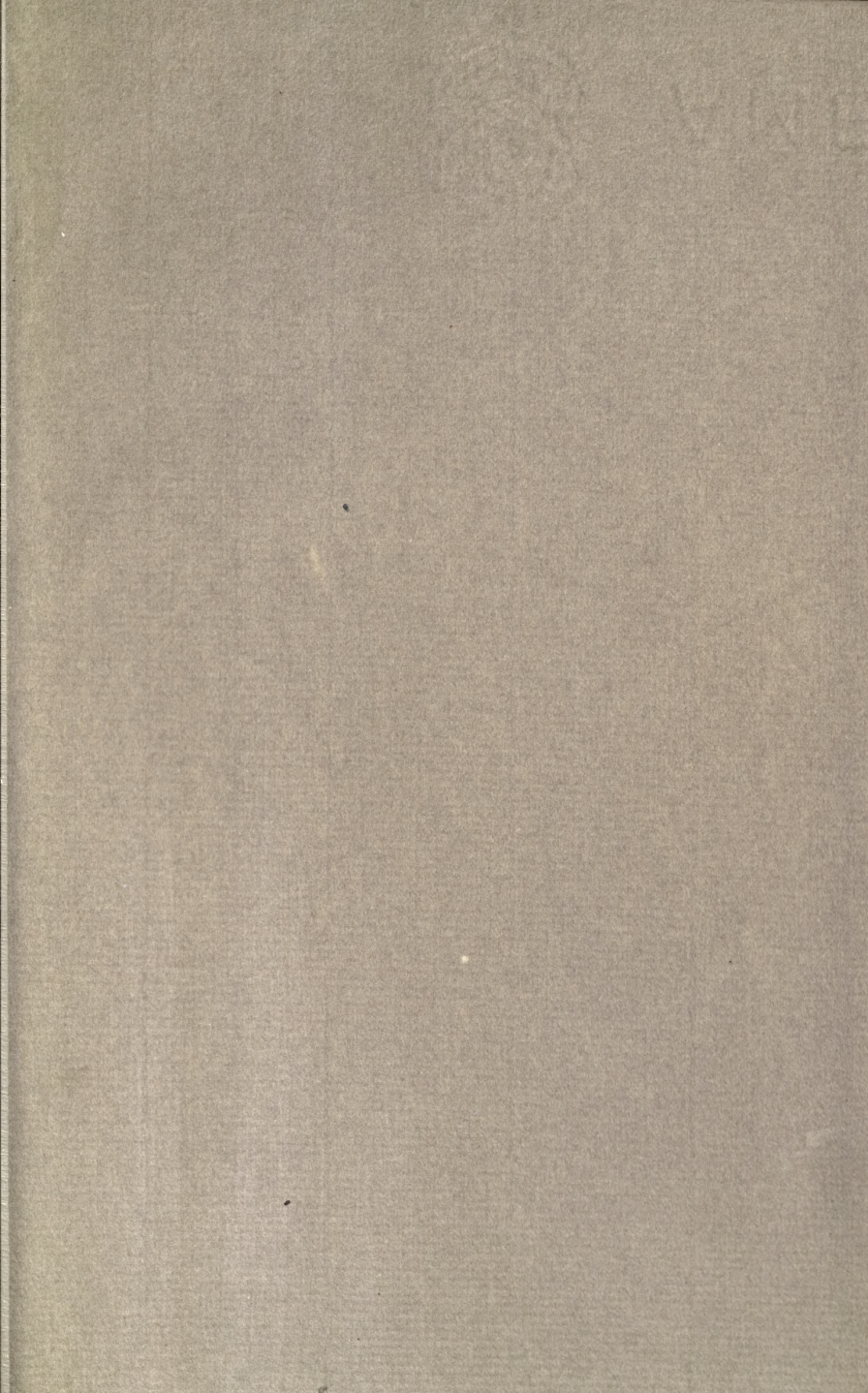
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